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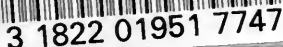


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HEROES OF THE NORSELANDS

THEIR STORIES
RETOLD

BY

KATHARINE.F.BOULT

WITH NINE ILLUSTRATIONS
BY

T.H.ROBINSON



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HEROES OF THE NORSELANDS

THE COMING OF THE GODS

I

IN the dawn of the world, when first the Northern Lands were peopled, came there Odin, a mighty god, out of the East, to rule and direct them : for he saw that these men with fair hair and blue eyes would do great deeds, and that, because of them, the North should be held in honour of all nations as long as the earth should last.

Sad was he, knowing that, for him and his, the end of all would come ere the greatness of this people reached its height. Yet was he content, since he, the All-Father, could teach them truth and honour and the love of glory, and to die joyfully, before the Twilight of the Gods crept over the earth, and since he knew that the kingdom of a gentler god would follow his.

Now the world was upheld by the mighty ash-tree, Yggdrasil, and round it on all sides was the sea ; and beyond the sea, the frozen land of the giants—Jötunheim.

Among the branches of Yggdrasil did Odin and

the gods set their beautiful city, Asgard, wherein they built many glorious halls ; and Odin's hall was called Valhalla. There did he welcome the heroes slain in battle, and bid them feast on ale and mead at eventide and go forth to warlike exercises when the sun was high.

And to join Asgard with the earth, there was built a bridge of many colours, glittering like sun-frost upon the trees on a winter morning, which the gods called Bifröst ; and all could ride over it but Thor, and he, by reason of his strength and weight, would have broken the bridge had he not, in his goat-chariot, gone by another way over the clouds.

At the end of Bifröst was a beautiful city, warded by the maidens called the Nornir. They it is who know the destinies of gods and men, and parcel out unto each the fate that was ordained before the beginning of Time.

And there, also, gushed forth the Fountain of Wisdom, of which the guardian is Mimir. To him one day came Odin, All-Father; seeking how he might better learn to rule the world, and he begged of Mimir a draught from the wondrous spring—

“Give me, I pray thee, O Mimir, of thy water, that I may know what is best for the gods of Asgard and for the men of lower earth.”

But Mimir shook his head :

“The water of my spring can only be come at through much toil and sacrifice, O All-Father ! Toil hast thou in plenty, but what of sacrifice ? Give me that which thou valuest most.”

The All-Father was silent, for most of all the world did he value the dear god Baldur the Beautiful, his son.

But Mimir knew his thought and smiled: "Baldur's time is not yet; work hath he still to do, although the Nornir have cut short his thread of life."

"Then most," said Odin, "do I prize mine eyes, since with them can I keep outlook from my throne over the doings of men. Yet shalt thou have one, if I may gather from thee wisdom that will serve me better than an eye."

Again Mimir smiled, and, filling a great beaker with the water of Urd, gave it to the god; and Odin, plucking out his eye, gave it into Mimir's hand, and drained the precious beaker.

"'Tis well," said the guardian of Urd; "ever shall thine eye be here, watered by the silver fountain, as a sign that thou—highest of gods—gave of thy best for men."

Then Odin turned away, but his face shone with the light of knowledge; for now he was sure of what he had never known ere this—how much or how little to do for his people for their highest good. For what the Nornir decreed he could not alter; yet might he work much sorrow by striving against them unwittingly, so was it best to have this fore-knowledge of their will.

II

WITH Odin, to Asgard, came many gods and goddesses. First, his wife, Frigga, queen of all; to her was all the future plain, and all secrets open; to her did the Nornir tell the weird they wove for men, but unto none did she ever make known that which should come to pass, not even to Odin.

And the oldest son of Odin and Frigga was Thor the Powerful. To him was it that All-Father turned for aid in his wars against the giants of Jötunheim, who ever strove against the gods for the undoing of men. To Thor belonged three most precious things: Miölnur, the Club that he hurled through the air, yet which always came back to his hand; Meginjord, the Belt of power, whereby his strength became double; and the Gauntlets of Iron, wherewith he held Miölnur, that it might reach its mark.

He it was who governed the thunder and the wind, and, since no horse could carry him, in a chariot drawn by goats did he ride.

Next unto Thor came Baldur the Bright, the son whom Frigga loved the best. With him dwelt peace and all things good and beautiful; within his temples might there be no noise of brawling, nor of strife, nor of feasting; and to him turned all those who sorrowed and needed help.

Many other gods were there who helped All-Father to rule the world of men, and yet one was there who wrought but mischief and evil, and through whom at last woe came upon the gods.

This was Loki the Cunning. To none is it known how he got place in Asgard, since he was a son of the giants, and many would have driven him forth, but Odin would not suffer it; whereby it was thought that All-Father knew the part that Loki must have in bringing about the Twilight of the Gods; and that none must fight against that which was decreed from the beginning.

Being evil, it was but in reason that the three children of Loki should be evil also. There were Fenrir, the Wolf, who dwelt chained in the Court of

Asgard; Jörmungand, the Serpent, who twined round the roots of Yggdrasil and gnawed unceasingly thereat; and Hela, the dread queen of the Fogland beyond the seas, where dwelt the dead that died not in battle.

And the hall of Loki had a door facing each way, that he might descry the approach of danger; for the wicked are ever suspicious.

III

NOW it fell one day, that a shadow came over the soul of Frigga, the queen, and she felt that danger drew nigh unto Baldur, her best beloved. After much thought, she went abroad into the world and took an oath of all people and things, that they should not harm the shining god. And all laughed, for they said:

“Mother Frigga, should we harm our dearest and thine, seeing that to Baldur do we look for all good, under the All-Father? Yet, for thy heart’s ease, O Mother, give we our word and gladly.”

And through all the land she went, taking oath of stones and trees, and birds and beasts; of fire, water, metals, and poisons. Then Frigga went home in joy and was at rest, and told the gods what she had done. And it became an evening sport among them to set Baldur over against the bound wolf, Fenrir, in the great court, and cast at him darts and stones and even the mace of Thor, and watch how all glanced harmlessly aside.

Then Loki, being in need of mischief, took the shape of an aged woman and crept to Frigga, where

she sat spinning by the doorway, watching the play of the gods.

“Can it be, O Frigga?” he asked, “that thou hast taken word of all things living, as they say, that none should hurt Baldur?”

And Frigga laughed a joyous laugh and answered:

“It is true, O Loki—since no old woman art thou; of all things save one weakly plant that seemeth scarcely to have life.”

“And that is—?” cried Loki eagerly.

“That is the feeble mistletoe that groweth on my apple-tree on the western side of Valhalla. To me it seemed too feeble to harm the least thing that liveth.”

Then Loki ran in haste to pluck the mistletoe from the west gate of Valhalla, and made his way to the peace-stead of the gods. Standing apart and alone he found the blind god, Hodur, and to him he crept.

“Hast thou no sport amidst the others that thou standest here apart?” he asked; and Hodur answered:

“Neither sight nor weapon have I, and ill sits sport on a sightless man”; and he sighed.

“Cast thou this, even for the honour of Baldur, and I will guide thy hand.”

And Hodur, led by Loki, cast the weak twig, and Baldur, pierced unto death, fell and spoke no word.

Then silence and grief fell upon the gods, in that their brightest and best was slain; and their sorrow was the greater in that Baldur, not having died in fight, must wend to the misty realm of Hela, daughter of Loki, and must return no more until the gods had passed away. And they raised the dead god tenderly, and softly took their way to the

sea-shore, where his long ship lay, and raising a pyre upon it they laid him thereon, with his horse and much treasure, and upon the breast of Baldur Odin laid his precious red-gold ring, which sank to the bottom of the sea, and, being found, caused much after woe. Then, putting fire to the pyre, they set the ship afloat, with her blue sails set, and watched her drift out in the line of the sunset into the western sea. Long they watched until the glimmering light sank down in the darkness; then turned them homeward to face the Twilight that was drawing near. And the Valkyrja maidens, Odin's messengers and gatherers of the slain, dight on their swan-feather dresses, and flew abroad over the earth-world, whispering in each steading and home, "Baldur is dead: weep; for Baldur the Beautiful is slain!" And there was grief through Midgard and all the outlying lands.

IV

BUT sorrowing Frigga could not rest, and at last she called Hermod, her son, and bade him sit beside her.

"My heart hungers sorely for Baldur dead. O my son! say, wilt thou, the most active of us all, go down to Hela and offer her all that I have, will she but free Baldur? for Asgard is cold and the earth is wintry, lacking his brightness."

"That will I, blithely, mother; may I but have Sleipnir, All-Father's eight-legged horse, to ride. For the way to Helheim is long and dreary, and even with Sleipnir must I be nine days upon the road."

So Hermod took the horse and made his way by the misty lands, through cold and darkness, fog and ice, to the halls of Hela.

Naught at the first would Hela say, but in the end she spoke :

“Hermod,” she said, “thou sayest that all things weep for Baldur dead. If that be so, he shall return unto Asgard ; but if but the smallest, weakest thing be dry-eyed, then shall he bide with me till Ragnarök, the Twilight of the Gods.”

Then lightly home rode Hermod with this promise, and again the Valkyrja flew forth saying :

“Weep, weep, ye great things and small ; weep all of ye, that Baldur may return to rejoice the world again.”

And all wept, so that it seemed as the melting of snow before the sun-heat of spring ; yet in one dark and rocky cave found they an aged and shrivelled witch-woman, and they besought her also that she should weep for the loosing of Baldur. But she grinned an evil grin, and answered :

“Weep an ye will. I weep with dry eyes the death of Baldur. Let Hela keep her prey.”

Then they turned sadly away, for they knew this witch must be Loki, the bringer of evil, and they carried their message back to mourning Asgard.

Then were all the gods wroth with Loki and set themselves to take him, but Loki, knowing their mind, fled away and took the shape of a salmon, hiding within the waters of a river ; and although All-Father saw his hiding-place yet might none come at him by reason of his quickness and cunning.

Thereupon did they take counsel together and made a net wherewith they swept the river, and after much trouble, did drive Loki into a corner between

two stones, and he, leaping over, was caught by the tail by Thor. Yet still would he have got free had not Thor held fast with all the strength of his hands. For this cause is it that salmon ever have their tails so fine and thin.

And Loki was carried unto a great rock and there bound with chains of iron, to remain until the Twilight of the Gods.

V

AND now Ragnarök, that fatal day drew nigh. Jörmungand had well nigh gnawed through the root of Yggdrasil, so that the mighty ash-tree trembled and groaned; Fenrir, the Wolf, burst his bonds and ravened over the earth; Loki shook himself loose from his fetters, and hurried to Vigrid; the great field where the last battle shall be fought.

Then crowed the red cock, and Heimdal, watchman of the gods and warder of Bifröst, rose up and sounded his trumpet so that all poured forth, in order, to their death fight. With Miölnir did Thor slay Jörmungand, but fell himself, poisoned by the flood of venom from the monster. Heimdal, falling upon Loki, slew him, but not ere Loki had wounded him unto his death. Fenrir, having first devoured the sun, fell upon Odin in the gloom and tore him so that he died; yet, dying, plunged his sword into the Wolf's heart.

Then fell the stars from heaven, the sea arose and covered the land, and all was darkness and silence for many ages; until a new sun shone forth and Baldur, let free from Helheim, came back to a new earth wherein all things were young and bright and beautiful.

SIGURD, THE VOLSUNG

I

King Volsung and the Branstock

BEFORE the Twilight of the Gods, in the long past days when Odin, the All-Father, came down from Asgard to mix with earth-men, there lived in Hunland a king and queen—descendants of Odin—who had no children.

But, not long before they died, there came to them a son, whom they called Volsung, and who became the head of the Volsung race. He, in time, grew into a great and powerful chief; he was over-lord of many tribes that he had fought and conquered, and he had ten sons, of whom the eldest was Sigmund, and one daughter, Signi, who was twin with Sigmund.

Signi was the most beautiful woman of her time, and the wisest; yet, because of her wisdom, was there ever sadness in her blue eyes, for it was given unto her to know that which should befall in the coming days, and she saw for her and her people only sorrow and death. For this she loved greatly her twin brother, knowing that for him the future should hold its worst, and yet that through him would come the greatest glory to her people; so that, as long as the world should last, the name of the Volsungs would be known and honoured.

Now King Volsung built for himself a house after the fashion of those times, only larger and

grander. Near the sea-shore, at the edge of the great forest, stood a mighty oak. Around this did the king build his feasting-hall, so that the trunk of the oak rose up in the midst and the branches came out through the roof and overshadowed the house. This was called the Branstock. Some skalds tell that it was no oak but an apple tree.

Inside, the hall was pillared with the trunks of trees against which were stands for torches, and whereon, also, the fighting men could hang their weapons, so that each man's arms should be to his hand if sudden alarm should arise; and down the centre of it, in the winter time, were four fires, but in summer only one was kept burning.

Many doors opened out of the hall leading to the bed-places of the men, and the rooms of the women, but the underlings lived in other buildings across the court, and only came into the hall at meal times. And all around the steading was a high fence of wood in which was only one gateway, in order that all might be safeguarded from foes and from the beasts of the forest.

In Gothland dwelt a mighty king, named Siggeir, and to him came the fame of Signi's beauty and wisdom, and of her father's wealth. Then he bethought him to take her for his wife, and, that Volsung should not dare to say him nay, he made ready his whole train of warships and men, and sailed with a great company oversea to Hunland.

And when King Volsung saw the array of warships with their terrible painted figure-heads of dragons, eagles, and strange sea-monsters; and the long line of shields hung over their sides—showing the number of fighting men Siggeir had brought—he feared the wrath of Siggeir; and when he strode

into the hall and made his demand, Volsung spoke him fair, and asked time to think upon it.

The king went forth, and Volsung and his sons took counsel together whether this evil thing should be. And all said "Yea" save only Sigmund; he, knowing the future as Signi did, saw all the woe that should come from this wedding, and would have saved his sister with his life.

In the end Volsung turned to Signi, who, white and still, had stood beside the Branstock alone, asking, "What says my daughter? Signi, what is thy will? Thy brethren and I fear that this mating must be."

Then the fairest Signi went to each of her brothers in turn and, looking straight into their eyes, saw there was no hope of escape; but into the eyes of Sigmund and her father could she not look for their hands covered them—and she answered:

"My father rule me in this as in all else; yet is this Siggeir cruel and crafty, and I fear me for the evil that will fall upon us Volsungs by this marriage."

And slowly and sadly, with her head bent so that the golden plaits touched the floor, she passed from the great hall.

There was a great feast made at midsummer, and runners went throughout the land to summon the chiefs to the wedding of the king's only daughter.

And King Siggeir sat on the high-seat over against his host, King Volsung, and pledged him in the ale cup, passed across the central fire, as the wont of the time was: for one fire burnt ever, day and night, in the hall of the Branstock. And, since it was the wont of those times to make great

vows at marriage and at midsummer feasts, the king made a vow that by him should the Volsungs come to their death ; but he spoke it not aloud, as a brave man should, but drank it silently with lowered eyes.

Now when the feasting was at its highest there strode into the hall an aged man of ruddy face and great stature, who had but one eye. On his head was a hood that half hid his face, over his shoulders a cloak of blue grey, and his feet were bare. In his hand was a great sword that glinted in the torchlight, and none dared greet him as he passed up the hall to the Branstock, although none guessed that this was Odin, All-Father, come to weave the fate of the Volsungs.

Mid the silence of that great company the Wanderer smote his sword deep into the trunk of the Branstock, so that only the glittering hilt stood out. Then, turning, he said :

“To him that can draw it forth give I this sword, a better could he ne’er ask.” And ere any could speak with him he disappeared.

Then each man, desiring to gain the sword, strove with his neighbour to be the first to touch the hilt, until King Volsung said :

“Unseemly is this strife ; let the noblest—our guest and son-in-law—try first, then each according to his rank.”

King Siggeir came forward and strove vainly to loosen the sword, and after him came King Volsung, then each according to his degree, save only Sigmund, who hung back. Last of all came he, and, as he touched the sword, behold ! it came forth in his hand.

Then was Siggeir wroth and said :

“Brother Sigmund, much treasure have I at

home, but not such a sword as this. Yield it unto me for thrice its weight in gold."

But Sigmund answered with scorn:

"Gold need I not, but a good sword shall I need throughout my life. Thou hadst the same chance as I to take it; why didst thou not do it?"

Black grew the heart of Siggeir at this taunt, and white was his face; but, being cunning, he hid his anger, and only Signi saw. But, to be revenged, he would not stay for the usual seven days of feasting, saying that storms would come, and he and his bride must away, and that her father and brethren must come to finish the feast in Gothland within three months.

Then Signi, warned by her fore-knowledge, went secretly to her father and said:

"Dear father, this evil mating is done, and I say naught for myself, for I must dree my weird. Yet I would not have you and my brothers share it, and I pray you come not to the halls of King Siggeir lest much sorrow come upon you all."

The king answered her tenderly: "Sweet daughter, my word is given that we should go. Better is it that we should suffer at his hands than that we should break a troth-word given."

Then, without one backward look at her home, the snow-white Signi sailed away to her life of ruth and sorrow.

II

The End of King Volsung

SO when the time came, King Volsung made ready three warships, and sailed to Gothland, as his promise was; and on a fair evening he

anchored in the haven over against King Siggeir's hall.

Then Signi, seeing her father's sails black against the sunset gold, stole down, heavy hearted, when the night fell, to the beach, for she alone knew that this was her last meeting with her people.

She told her father of the gathering of Siggeir's army, hidden in the Mirk Wood. "His heart is full of guile," she said, and the last tears she would ever shed fell thick; "mighty is his host, and naught can save thee but to sail away this night from this dark and baleful land. Take me with thee, O father, back to our happy sunlit home."

But the old king answered quietly, as he laid his hand on her bent head: "Sweet daughter, nay, if this be our fate to die in a strange land, then must we meet it; for never shall it be said that a Volsung turned his back on death."

Then Signi wrung her hands and bade him farewell, and from that day forth she neither wept nor smiled, but, white and still, plotted ever how she might avenge her kinsfolk.

When morning broke, the Volsungs landed and drew themselves up in battle order on a little hill. Before them spread the host of the traitor, and, as they saw it, they looked each other in the eyes and smiled, till the rosy dawn made a glory of unearthly light in their faces; for they knew that this was their last fight, and their hearts were glad that the Valkyrja should gather them in to feast with Odin in Valhalla.

But many foemen would they take with them, and eight times on that fatal day did the old king and his men hew their way back and forth through the hosts of Siggeir, until, as the sun went down,

all lay dead, save only the ten sons of the king.

These were taken alive by Siggeir, and fastened with cords, for it was not meet to kill a foe at evening, and also he willed that his wicked witch-mother should choose the death that they should die. Then he stole away to her and asked her counsel, saying: "The men have I, and the sword have I also; say, mother, what shall be the fate of these Volsungs?"

And she thought for a while.

"Take these ten men, O my son," she said at last, "and chain them to a great log in the Mirk Wood. There shall the beasts of the forest deal with them, and on thee will there be no blood guilt before thy wife."

Then was this done, and Siggeir went unto Signi, and she asked him for tidings of her father and brethren.

"Thy father died as Volsungs should die," he answered; "thy brethren live and wait my pleasure."

And to Signi came a little hope, for she said:

"Surely I shall find a means of deliverance," and she called unto her a faithful servant and bade him go at dawn to bring word of the Volsungs.

But, in the night, came a great grey she-wolf, that fell upon one brother so that he died, and she ate him, and vanished into the Mirk Wood.

And the Faithful One, coming at twilight dawn, found but the nine, and went to tell the queen. Yet naught could she do to save them, and so it fell out nightly, until nine of the Volsungs were gone, and only Sigmund, her dearest, was left.

Then she bethought her, and sent the Faithful One with honey, wherewith he smeared the face of

Sigmund, so that when the wolf came she smelt it and stopped to lick it, and in this wise was Sigmund able to catch her unawares and tear her jaws asunder so that she died.

And then he knew that this wolf was a skin-changer, and the mother of King Siggeir; and his heart was glad in that he had been the bane of one of this wolf-race.

But of this Siggeir recked naught, since he held the sword of the Branstock.

Then, by the help of the Faithful One, did Sigmund get free and find an abiding place in an underground hut in the Mirk Wood, and there dwelt, being provided by Queen Signi with all things needful. And King Siggeir wot not that the strongest and best of the Volsungs yet lived.

Thus passed the years, until Signi's eldest son numbered ten winters, and she sent him unto Sigmund, that he should try whether the boy would become a hero to avenge the Volsung's wrongs.

"My mother sends me with this word—'Try thou my son, if he be fit for thy work,' " said the boy.

And Sigmund said: "Mix thou the bread for our meal, while I fetch wood."

But when he returned, the meal-bag lay on the ground, and the child sat, frightened, in a corner.

"Why is there no bread?" asked Sigmund.

"Something moveth in the meal-bag," answered the lad, "and I durst not put my hand in."

"Hie thee down to thy mother for a nidding,"¹ said Sigmund. And the boy went.

Then sent Signi her second son, and with him it happened even as with the elder, and Signi bade her brother slay them both.

¹ Good-for-naught.

III

The Avenging of the Volsung

SO passed many weary years, until Sinfjötli, her third son, was grown. Him did she send in like manner to his brothers, and him did Sigmund also bid make bread while he sought wood.

At his return, he found the bread-cake ready. "How comes this?" he asked. "Didst thou find naught in the meal-bag?"

"Truly," answered Sinfjötli; "there was something living therein, but I kneaded it in and baked it."

Then Sigmund laughed grimly, for he knew the avenger had come.

"No bread will there be for thee to-night, for thou hast baked up a deadly serpent."

But Sigmund could eat of the bread, for so strong was he that no venom could harm him.

Together did these two many mighty deeds; but, though still a youth, Sinfjötli was wild and savage beyond all men, and Sigmund, looking on him, feared that, with the Volsung strength, he had gotten the evil heart of King Siggeir; yet never were his deeds crooked, and he ever spake the truth, since fear had he none.

And Sigmund, willing to prove him, whether he were yet fitted to help him in his vengeance and Signi's, led him forth to seek plunder. And in time they came to a house where lay two men asleep, and over each man's head hung a wolf-skin. Then knew they that these were skin-changers, somewhat like unto the mother of Siggeir; but in this way, that only every tenth day might they come forth and be men.

And they dight on their skins, and went forth from the house, but Sinfjötli, wondering, said :

“It seemeth me that, with the skin, I take the ways of wolves, for I know the voices of the Mirk Wood, and much that was hidden from me before.”

“So is it,” answered Sigmund, “to me is thy speech plain, but to earth-men would it be but a wolf’s howl. Now see. Each of us will take his way alone through the forest and seek out men. If there be but seven, each of us shall fight the seven alone, but if there be more, then shalt thou call on me in this wise, and I will come to thy aid.”

And Sigmund lifted up his head and howled, that the youth might know the cry, and so they parted.

Then went Sinfjötli and met eleven men and slew them, after much fighting ; but he was sorely wearied thereafter, and lay hidden to take rest. And to him, softly padding through the wood, came Sigmund, and as he came he passed the eleven dead men.

“Why hast thou left me uncalled ? ” he asked, as he looked down on the panting wolf. And Sinfjötli laughed.

“What are eleven men ? ” quoth he.

Then came the wicked wolf nature upon Sigmund, and he sprang at the youth and bit him in the throat, so that he lay sore hurt, but, seeing the wound, his manhood came again, and he sorrowed grievously in that he had slain the boy, and cursed those wolf-skins with their evil nature. Yet naught could he mend it, so he bore him home with sore labour to the earth-hut and sat by him.

And, as he sat, there came two weasels fighting,

so that one slew the other; then the whole one, seeking the blade of a certain herb, laid it upon the wound of his fellow, so that he became whole also. Seeing this, straightway did Sigmund find the herb, and lay it upon the throat of Sinfjötli, and the wound became as if it had never been. Then was the heart of Sigmund glad, and when the ten days of their wolf-hood ended they made a great fire and burned those skins, so that no more should harm be wrought by them.

Then, on a day chosen of Sigmund, these two went forth from their earth-house and the Mirk Wood to the hall of Siggeir, the king, and they hid themselves among the barrels of ale that stood in the porch, while the Faithful One went and told Signi that they had come.

Now two little children, the youngest born of Signi and Siggeir, played in the hall with a golden ball, and the ball rolled to the place where the two were hid. Thither came the children seeking it, and beheld the warriors sitting grim and still, and they ran to the king, as he sat on the high-seat, and told him, saying: "Behold the great kings who sit silent at the back of the porch, O father, in their golden helmets and shirts of glittering mail. Have they come at last, as our mother's stories said they would some day?"

And the king turned, glowering on Signi, but the queen's blue eyes flashed fire, and her head rose proudly, for she knew that her vengeance was nigh-

She looked not on her husband, but, taking a child in either hand, she stepped from the high-seat, and swept down the hall, while all men's eyes went after her, wondering. And, standing by the porch, she cried aloud:

"Come, brother, slay me these betrayers."

"Nay, sister," answered Sigmund, "though thy children betray me, I slay them no more."

But Sinfjötli picked up the children and cast them down dead.

Then Siggeir stood up and called to his men: "Slay me these men in the porch."

And the fighting men ran together in haste, and after much toil took Sigmund and Sinfjötli—for they were but two against many—and bound them. And because it was not fitting to kill captives at sundown, the cruel king bethought him what would be the hardest death for them to die, and he bade the thralls dig a deep hole in the ground, and therein he set a big flat stone on its edge, so that the hole was divided into two parts, and he set Sigmund on one side of the stone and Sinfjötli on the other, that they might each hear the other's voice, and yet be parted.

And while the thralls were turfing over the hole, Signi came quickly and cast down a large bundle of straw to Sinfjötli. Then was the turfing finished, and the two buried in black night within the barrow. Then Sinfjötli cried:

"The queen has sent us meat here in the straw, and thrust in the meat is thy sword, for I know the touch of the hilt."

"Then let us saw the stone," said Sigmund, "for naught blunts my good sword."

So Sinfjötli drove the point of the sword hard through the stone, and Sigmund caught it and they sawed, as stonecutters do, until the stone fell asunder.

Then was it easy for them to cut a way out through wood and turf, and they piled faggots

around the hall of Siggeir and set fire to it; and Siggeir from within cried :

“Who hath kindled this fire?”

“I, Sigmund, the Volsung, that thou mayst know that a Volsung yet liveth.”

Then he called above the roar of the flames :

“Signi! Signi! beloved sister, come forth. Thou has dreed thy weird. Come forth and receive atonement for the sorrows of thy life in Gothland.”

So Signi came forth; her blue eyes blazed in the fierce firelight, but her golden hair was white with the sorrow of all the years.

She kissed her brother and her son, saying :

“Dear brother, through thee hath my vengeance come and I care to live no more. Sadly did I wed King Siggeir, but gladly will I die with him. So fare ye well.”

And with head held high, and no backward look, she swept straight into the flames, and so died with King Siggeir and his men.

IV

The Death of Sinfjötli and Sigmund

NOW was there naught more to do in Gothland, and Sigmund gathered men and ships and sailed home to Hunland to live in the hall of the Branstock.

He was a great and wise king, but never did the sorrow of the Volsungs' ending die out of his heart. He took to wife a jarl's daughter called Borghild, who hated Sinfjötli, both for the love Sigmund

bore him, and also because, in fair fight, he had slain her brother. She begged the king to send him away out of the land; but he would not, and gave her instead great stores of gold and amber and jewels as were-gild,¹ for in those days the price of a life was paid to the nearest of kin.

Now, in honour, Borghild having taken the price of blood, should have been silent and have pardoned the slayer; but she thought only of vengeance, and made a mighty funeral feast, bidding thereunto all the great ones of the land.

When they were seated she carried horns of ale and mead to those whom she wished to honour, and amongst them, one to Sinfjötli, saying:

“Drink, fair kinsman.”

Sinfjötli, looking into her eyes, beheld their guile, so he said:

“Nay, it is a witch-draught, and I drink not.”

“Give it to me,” said Sigmund, and he drained the horn, for no venom could harm him.

Then came the queen again to Sinfjötli, saying:

“Come, drink! Must other men drink for thee?”

He took the horn, and looking into it, he answered:

“It is a baleful drink.”

And again did Sigmund take the horn and drain it, while the angry queen tossed her head. Yet a third time she came, saying:

“If thou hast the heart of a Volsung, and art no niddering, drink!”

Now, no true man can be called a niddering, even by an angry woman, so Sinfjötli took the horn and drained it, saying:

¹ Blood-money.

"Venom is in the drink," and as he spoke he fell dead, and so great was the shock of his fall that the Branstock swayed.

Sorrowing unto death, Sigmund rose up with his sister's son in his arms, and strode away through the forest until he reached a lonely fjord, where sat a man in a little boat, and the man had but one eye.

"Those who sent me told me that a king, and the son of a king, would come," said the man, "but, since the boat will hold but two, walk thou round by the shore."

And behold, as Sigmund turned, boat and steersman vanished away; so the aged king knew that this was Odin come to take a Volsung to Valhalla.

The evil Borghild did he drive away, and after wandering awhile she died, and left him free to wed again.

There lived, near by, a king who had a fair and wise daughter named Hjordis and a son Gripir, who had fore-knowledge. She was sweet and full of love, and it seemed good to the aged Sigmund that he should pass the evening of his days in peace with this gentle maiden.

He, therefore, journeyed into her father's land, and so did also a younger king, Lynge, son of Hunding, who willed to wed her.

Fearing strife, her father said to her: "Hjordis, my word have I given that thou alone shouldst choose thy husband. Say, therefore, wise daughter of mine, which wilt thou take?"

"This is a hard thing," she replied. "Yet will I choose King Sigmund. Though he be old, still is he the greatest of heroes, and of the Volsung race."

So were Sigmund and Hjordis wed; but the young king, Lynge, went away with rage in his heart, and he and his brethren gathered a great army for the undoing of King Sigmund.

Then sailed they to Hunland, and Sigmund gathered his men by the sounding of King Volsung's horn, which in peace time hung on the Branstock.

And now began the most awesome fight that had been since the death of King Volsung; but ere it began, Hjordis, with her tire-maiden and much treasure, was hidden in the forest.

All day the fight went forward, and old though Sigmund was, none could prevail against him. Naught could one see but the swift flash of the sword that no man might break, as he hewed his way through the throng, his arms red with blood.

Now, when the sun was at its setting there came up against Sigmund a stranger in a blue-grey cloak; one-eyed and grey-bearded was he, and he carried a spear in his hand. And as the king's sword smote against the steel, behold the good sword split in two pieces and its fortune was gone.

Then the tide of battle turned, and the Volsung's men fell fast until all—even the father of Hjordis—were dead or sore wounded. But Sigmund, still living though stricken with death, lay upon the field. And through the darkness crept the gentle, hapless queen seeking her lord. Kneeling beside him and wiping the death-dews from his face, she asked: "Canst thou not be healed even now, my king?"

"Dear wife," he answered, "nay, and I would have it even as it is. I have lived long, and with my sword has my fortune left me. Nor does Odin

will that I should live, for he himself it was who broke my sword ; and to him shall I journey, riding straight to Valhalla gates. So to another must I leave it to avenge thy father—to a mightier than I. Thou shalt have a son ; care for him well and save for him the two pieces of my sword ; thereof shall a noble weapon be made that shall be called Gram, and Sigurd shall wield it. He shall be the last and noblest of our race, and while this earth lasts shall the name of the *Golden Sigurd* be known. Now fare thee well, dear heart, for I weary with my wounds and fain would feast with Odin.”

Then Hjordis kissed him and laid his head upon her knees, and so sat, with her handmaiden beside her, until the daybreak ; and, as the first light came, the great king looked up into her eyes and smiled and died.

But King Lynge sought through all the land for Hjordis and her treasure, and finding them not, he took the land and harried it.

V

The Land of Hjaalprek, the Helper, and the Birth of Sigurd

NOW the day was come, and Hjordis, the queen, arose wearily, and, looking over the sea, saw many ships. Fearing another foe, she said unto her maiden : “ I dread more strife and am here helpless with none to defend me ; change thou, therefore, thy raiment with me that none may know me for a king’s daughter.” This they did as the

seamen came up from the ships ; at their head was Alv, son of Hjaalprek, King of Denmark, who inquired of the women what this slaughter meant. Then Hjordis answered and told of the great fight, and the Viking prince marvelled at her sweet low voice and clear words, which were not those of a bond-woman, and spoke her fair so that she believed in him, and showed him where the Volsung treasure lay hidden from the foemen who sought it.

When all was gathered together and put upon the ships, and a barrow raised over the dead kings, the prince asked the bond-woman :

“Wilt thou, O Queen, with thy handmaiden wend back with me to Denmark?”

And the false queen looked to Hjordis to answer, and she said :

“If peace dwell in thy land, O prince, thither will we gladly wend, for we are but weak women and are weary of strife.”

Then they sailed away, taking Gripir also, and the prince took the helm of his ship and talked with the women as he steered ; and every hour he wondered more that the maiden should be so much wiser than her lady.

After a fair voyage they came to the low shores of Denmark, where fir woods come down to the sands by the sea, and Alv led the maidens before his father, Hjaalprek, and his mother, who bade them welcome, and treated them with honour.

Then Alv spoke to his parents of his thought that Hjordis was no thrall's daughter, and the wise old king made a plot to catch them and to learn the truth.

As they sat together at eventide around the fire

in the hall, Hjaalprek asked the maiden: "How knowest thou when dawn is nigh?"

"Whereas," she answered, "I milked the kine when I was young, now wake I ever at the self-same hour before the dawn."

Then Hjaalprek, the king, laughed a mighty laugh, being well pleased.

"Kings' daughters milk not kine," he cried, and turned him to Hjordis, and put to her the same question.

"I know," she answered heedlessly, "by the little gold ring given me by my father, which groweth ever cold at the dawn of day."

Then spoke Alv:

"No bond-maid art thou, but a princess; why hast thou dealt doubly with me? Hadst thou spoken truly thou shouldst have been as my sister."

Hjordis felt shame for her deceit, and she knelt before the kind old king and queen and said:

"The wrong is mine, but pardon me, I pray. Bethink you! I, the widow of Sigmund, the Vol-sung, was alone with this my maiden in the midst of my enemies, even my young brother lost for the time. I knew not but that your son was their helper; how could I tell how good a friend he would be to me?"

And the widowed queen turned and smiled upon Prince Alv, so that he loved her the more; and he stood forth in the midst of the hall, leading her by the hand, saying:

"For thy beauty and wisdom do I love thee, Hjordis, and when thy days of mourning for the great king are past, then shalt thou be my wife."

Before many weeks were over, the son of

Sigmund and Hjordis was born; they carried the child upon a shield to King Hjaalprek, who rejoiced greatly over him, and, calling for water, named him Sigurd, according to his father's will. Also, seeing the child's keen bright eyes, shining like stars, he foretold that throughout all the earth, no man should be his equal.

Thus in the midst of peace, love, and honour, grew Sigurd. Brave and true-hearted, he scorned a lie, nor ever sought his own advantage. Yet, withal he was so gentle that little children ever ran to him and loved him. Yet could he fight, and was he ever foremost in warlike sports, bearing in mind that he must be the avenger of his father.

The wise old king chose for him a teacher to show him all those things that princes should know; so was he learned in all games of skill, in speech of many tongues, in metal work, in woodcraft and in shipcraft.

This teacher was Regin, the master-smith, son of Hreidmar. A strange being was he, misshapen yet not a dwarf, silent and glowering unto all save only Sigurd; skilled in runes, in the lore of many lands, and in metal work, so that the people whispered of his kinship to the underground folk, who have all metals in their keeping. But Hjaalprek knew not that he was full of guile, and that throughout the years of Sigurd's growth, he plotted how he might use the lad for his own wicked ends, and be his undoing. Thus one day he said:

"It is shameful that thou hast no horse. These kings treat thee as their foot-boy. These kings, forsooth! in whose land is peace, and who go not out to fight."

"That is false," said Sigurd hotly, "and thou

knowest it. If I need a horse I have but to ask. The kings are beloved of all and need not to fight. Yet if fighting were toward, father Alv would do his part."

And he went angrily out of the smithy. But after some months he went to King Alv and begged a horse of him, and the king said :

"Go choose thee one from the herd by Busil-water; they are the best, and all that is mine is thine, brave son."

Sigurd blithely thanked the king, and took his way to the meadow far up the woods, where the Busil-water ran. On the way he met an aged man, with a long grey beard and one eye, who asked whither he fared.

"To choose me a horse, O Ancient One. If thou art a judge, come with me to help my choice."

And the old man journeyed with him, telling him of his father Sigmund, and his forefather Volsung, whom the Aged One had known. Then Sigurd knew that this must be one of the god-folk, to have lived so long.

As they talked, they came to the green meadow where the horses were, and the old man said :

"Now, will we drive the horses through the river of roaring water, and watch what will betide."

And the force of the water, rushing down from the mountains, frightened the horses, so that they turned and swam to land again, save one grey horse with a broad strong chest, who feared naught. He alone swam to the far side, and there landed, neighing and stamping in pride, then plunged into the torrent once more and swam back to the Ancient One and Sigurd.

"This one must I choose : is it not so ?" asked

the lad; and the old man answered: "Thou chooseth well, for he is of the race of Sleipnir, All-Father's horse, that never tires," and, as he spoke, he vanished away; and Sigurd knew that this must be Odin himself.

Then he took the horse, which he named Grane, and went back to the hall of the kings well pleased, and they and Hjordis rejoiced with him.

But after a time, crafty Regin went yet further with his plan, and he asked: "Where is the treasure of thy father, the Volsung?"

"It is in the treasure-room of Queen Hjordis," Sigurd replied; "it is a fair treasure, but I have heard of greater, gathered by some kings."

"Why is it not thine?" asked Regin.

Sigurd laughed and said: "What should I, a boy, do with this treasure? It is naught to me, and there is no magic in it, else might I desire it."

"And wouldst thou have a magic treasure?" asked Regin keenly.

"I know not," the lad answered carelessly. "A great hero can I be without aid of magic. It was idle talk."

"But if I could help thee to great treasure and glory, wouldst thou refuse?"

"Why surely, nay," quoth Sigurd; "is it not for glory that the Volsungs live?"

"Come, then, and I will unfold to thee a tale that, hitherto, no man has known."

And the old man and the young laid them down under a spreading oak in the greenwood, and Regin told this wondrous story.

VI

The Rhine Gold

HREIDMAR, king of the dwarf-folk, was my father, and brothers had I two. Fafnir, the elder, was having and grim; ever would he take the best, and of the best all that he could, for he loved gold. Otter was the second, and his will was to be ever fishing, so that Hreidmar gave him the gift of changing into an otter, and thus he spent most of his life on the river rocks, landing only to bring fish to my father. I was the third son, a weak, misshapen thing, but with, as thou hast seen, the gift of runes, and cunning in all metal work.

It fell one day as Otter slumbered beside a half-eaten salmon, that Odin and Loki passed by. Now Loki, the wicked one, would ever be at evil, and he caught up a sharp stone and hit Otter, so that he died. Rejoicing, he flayed off Otter's furry skin, and, casting it over his shoulder, went on with Odin to Hreidmar's hall—a golden house of beauty that I had built for him. Hreidmar, knowing the skin for that of Otter, seized the gods and cried:

“By the beard of Odin, ye go not forth until ye pay me, in were-gild for my son, as much gold as will cover his skin inside and out.”

“We have no gold,” said Loki.

“The worse for thee,” said Hreidmar, for he was grim and hard, and angered that no more would Otter fish for him.

Loki, the crafty, thought awhile; then he said:

“If thou wilt give me leave I will go take Andvari's gold.”



Sigurd smote the Szwora on the Anvil.



Now Andvari was a dwarf, who lived in Otter's river, under a waterfall that was called Andvari's Foss. He guarded a great treasure that he had stolen long years before from the Rhine maidens in the Southern land, but that history belongs not here. For the most part he took the shape of a pike, so that, with the greater comfort, he might guard his treasure.

Hreidmar gave leave, and Loki hurried down to Ran, the sea-goddess, and begged her magic net. This she gave, and Loki, casting it under the foss, drew forth Andvari, the pike.

"What ransom wilt thou, evil one?" cried Andvari in terror.

"All thy ill-gotten gold, O dwarf."

"That shalt thou never have."

So Loki hung the net of the goddess upon a tree, and sat down to watch the great pike struggling and gasping. At last Andvari said feebly:

"Put me back in the foss; thou shalt have my gold." And he brought it forth.

But Loki, as he gathered it up, espied one little gold ring around his fin, and said:

"Thy red-gold ring must I have also."

Then Andvari shrieked with rage, and threw the ring at him, cursing him and the Rhine gold and all that should own it.

"To every man that owns it," said he, "shall it be a bane and a woe until it return to the Rhine daughters. To each holder of the ring shall come an evil death, and because of it the hearts of queens shall break, and the Twilight of the Gods shall come."

And he plunged into the foss and was seen no more.

Back went Loki to the House Beautiful and

cast the gold at my father's feet ; but the bane-ring gave he to Odin. Now this ring was that one that Odin had laid on the pyre of Baldur dead, and to it was given the gift of making every ninth night eight rings equal in weight to itself.

Then was the fur spread out and covered with gold, first on the one side, then on the other, till but one hair was uncovered. And Hreidmar spake :

“ There is yet one hair showing.”

The gods looked one upon another ; then Odin drew the ring from his finger and cast it upon the skin, so that the hair was hidden. Then Loki mocked and sang :

“ A great were-gild hast thou !
But thou and thy son
The bane shall it be of ye both.”

And the gods departed.

Then Fafnir, looking covetously on the gold, slew our father for it, and me, being weak, he drove away ; and, taking it to a secret place, on Gnita Heath, in the Desolate Land, he changed himself into an awful dragon, the better to guard it ; and there is no worm like unto him, for he is made up of sin and evil. So I have no part in that which is rightfully mine, and I would that thou shouldst win it for thyself, O Sigurd.

“ But wherefore,” asked Sigurd, “ shouldst thou not fight and win it ? ”

“ What chance hath a weakling against that great worm ? ” said Regin. “ Besides, my doom is that I should be slain by a beardless youth.”

Then up sprang Sigurd and cried :

“Forge thou me a sword of power, and when my father is avenged, even then will I go up with thee against thy brother and get thee the gold thou cravest.”

And Regin rejoiced that his plan worked, and they went back to the hall of the kings, speaking of the sword that should be forged ; but Regin told not Sigurd of the helmet of darkness and the mail coat of gold that were with the treasure of Andvari.

So after some days he put a sword into the hands of Sigurd, and the lad, looking at it, laughed in mirth.

“Why dost thou laugh?” asked the master.

“Because thy hand hath lost its skill. See!” and Sigurd smote the sword upon the anvil so that it flew in pieces.

Then Regin forged yet another, and said :

“Hard art thou to please. Mayhap this may be to thy mind.”

And Sigurd looked at it, and smote it upon the anvil so that it split in half. Then he looked keenly upon Regin and frowned, saying :

“Mayhap thou also art a traitor like thy kin. Is it thy will that Fafnir should slay me, that thou forgest me swords of wood? Canst thou do no better than that?”

And he turned from the smithy and went to his mother ; but Regin was angered at his words and hated him.

Queen Hjordis sat in the women’s room brooding with her maidens, when her son cast himself down by her side, and seeing that he spoke not, she said :

“What ails my son? Needs he aught that the kings and I can give him?”

"All love and much honour have I ever from thee, mother mine, and for this I owe ye all thanks and obedience. Yet one thing I lack. Have I heard aright that thou hast the sherds of the sword that my father, Sigmund, gave thee at his death?"

"It is true," Hjordis said, but her heart was sad, for she knew that their parting time had come.

"Fain would I have them, for with no sword but Gram can I do my life's work."

Then she led him to her treasure-chamber, and from its silken coverings in the old oak chest she drew the pieces of the sword, glittering and bright as in the day that the Wanderer smote it into the Branstock, and she gave them to Sigurd with a kiss.

Blithely went the lad forth, but Hjordis looked after him, wistful, yet rejoicing in that the prophecies of Sigmund and Hjaalprek were to be fulfilled, and that her son, with the eyes like stars, should be the hero of all the ages.

At the smithy door Regin met him, frowning.

"Will naught serve thee but Gram?" he asked in wrath.

"Naught but Gram!" Sigurd said, and laughed. "Gram shall slay the Serpent; take it and do thy best."

Regin took it and shut himself for many days into the smithy with his men, and, after much labour, the sword was wrought; but the smiths told how, as Regin bore it forth from the forge, fire ran adown its edge. Regin looked at it and said:

"Well know I that I shall die by the sword of a youth, but, if it be by Gram, then am I content: for I am weary of the length of days that have

dragged on since I forged this blade for Odin, the Wanderer."

To Sigurd, waiting at the smithy door, he gave the sword, saying sullenly: "If this be not good, then is indeed my craft gone."

Then ran Sigurd joyfully down to the stream and cast therein a lock of wool, and, as it floated down, it met the edge of Gram and the lock became two, and Sigurd laughed again.

Then said Regin: "Bethink thee, now thou hast a sword to thy mind, of thy promise to go up against Fafnir?"

"That will I gladly when I have avenged my father on the Hundings," said the lad.

Then the kings made ready many ships, and Sigurd was chief over them, and they sailed to the land of the Volsungs, and in a great battle slew King Lynge and the Hundings, and added that kingdom to the lands of Hjaalprek the Helper. And ever in the thickest of the press gleamed Gram.

Now, when he was come home some time, Sigurd grew weary of quiet, and Gram rattled in its sheath under the peace-strings, as it hung on the wall over Sigurd's seat.

So he went to Regin, who sat wearily by the smithy fire; he turned not as Sigurd entered, and, drawing up a stool, sat by him. After a while the lad spoke:

"To-morrow will I ride with thee to the Waste, Regin, if thou wilt; maybe I shall slay thy brother."

"Two shall go forth," said Regin gloomily, "but neither shall return."

"No matter," quoth Sigurd, "we will try our best for the hoard."

And that night he went unto his Uncle Gripir

and learned from him all that should befall him in the future ; though Gripir was sore troubled and scarce would speak at the outset, yet in the end he told unto Sigurd all that his life should bring.

VII

The Slaying of the Worm

ERE the dawn Sigurd arose, and, going silently, he went to his mother and kissed her gently, for he knew from Gripir that he should see her no more ; then, saddling Grane, he rode forth to the Lonesome Waste, with Regin at his side.

Ever inland and upward they rode as the days went by, leaving meadows, trees, and all green things behind. At last they came out upon the Waste beside a mountain torrent, where Fafnir was wont to drink, and Sigurd traced the broad band of slime that he made as he crawled back and forth.

"Surely," said he, "this dragon brother of thine is greater than all other ling-worms, from the breadth of his track?"

"Nay, not so," said Regin. "Dig thou but a pit in his path and sit therein, then canst thou stab him from beneath. As for me, since in naught can I help thee, I will get me to a place of safety," and he rode down the rocks.

Then Sigurd put Grane in shelter, and turned to cross Gnita Heath ; and, as he went, there met him a grey-beard with one eye, who asked him whither he went and what to do, and Sigurd told him.

"That counsel is evil," said the Ancient One ;

“bide thou here and dig many pits, else into one will the dragon’s blood flow and drown thee as thou standest.”

And ere the youth could answer he was gone.

So Sigurd spent the night in digging pits in the path of Fafnir; and at early dawn, as he sat in the largest, he felt the trembling of the earth, and knew that Fafnir was nigh.

Snorting and spitting venom as he went, the great Worm crept slowly on, fearing naught, and, as he passed over the pit, Sigurd thrust up Gram with all his strength behind the dragon’s left shoulder, and drew it forth black to the hilt; and Fafnir’s blood gushed forth and covered Sigurd as he stood, save only in one spot between his shoulders where a dead leaf had lighted. Then he leaped from the pit and stood afar off, as the mighty Worm lashed out in the pain of his death-wound, crying, “Who art thou, and whence? thou that art the undoing of Fafnir.”

But Sigurd, mindful that Fafnir might curse him if he told his name, answered: “Nameless am I, and born of nameless folk.”

“Ah,” cried Fafnir, “shame that I should be slain by a liar. He should be a hero that bringeth me doom, yet can a hero lie?”

Then was Sigurd shamed, for he ever told the truth, and he said:

“I am Sigurd, son of Sigmund, the Volsung, and no liar. Tell me of the days that are to come to me.”

For all men believed that to the dying was the future clear, and Sigurd willed to see if the words of Gripir and Fafnir were the same. And Fafnir spoke:

"I see bane unto thee from the gold, Andvari's hoard, and from the fatal ring. Take thy horse and ride away and flee from the evil. Yet shall we meet and fight again in the day of the Destruction of the Gods, thou Golden Sigurd."

"Nay," quoth Sigurd, "for thy gold I came, and without it will I not go. Without gold cannot man live."

Then Fafnir poured forth words of ruth and wisdom; and as the sun went down he quivered and lay a chill grey heap upon the Waste, and the sunset light shone upon the bright hair of the Golden Sigurd, as, sword in hand, he looked down on the fell mass.

Then came Regin, who had watched from afar, hastening to greet Sigurd.

"Hail, lord and conqueror!" he cried; "henceforth shalt thou be known throughout the ages as Fafnir's Bane."

"Small aid wert thou," laughed Sigurd, "hiding while I fought."

"Yet," said Regin grimly, "were it not for the sword I forged thou hadst now lain low before Fafnir. And, since he was my brother, and thou hast slain him, for atonement shalt thou roast me his heart with fire, that I may eat it."

"That will I," said Sigurd, and he set to gather sticks in the gloaming while Regin slept, and the birds gathered round, and he set Fafnir's heart upon a stick to roast.

When it should have been ready, Sigurd laid his fingers upon it and the fat, hissing out, burnt them so that he put them in his mouth to cool; and behold straightway he knew the words of the woodpeckers that chattered as they hopped around.

The first said :

“Thou foolish Sigurd to roast for Regin. Eat thou the heart and so become wisest of men.”

The second said :

“Thou guileful Regin, that wouldst betray the trusting youth.”

The third said :

“Smite thou the guileful one, Sigurd, and become thyself lord of the gold.”

The fourth said :

“That is good counsel, to take the treasure and hie over Hindfell to sleeping Brynhild.”

The fifth fluttered and said :

“Sigurd is a fool if he spareth him whose brother he has just slain.”

Then up sprang Sigurd, saying :

“Regin shall be no bane of me. He shall follow his brother.”

And he smote Regin with Gram, so that his head rolled away.

Then the birds rejoiced and sang glad songs of Sigurd's journeyings, and of Brynhild over Hindfell, whom he should find, while Sigurd ate part of Fafnir's heart and saved the rest.

Then he leapt on Grane and rode by the dragon's slimy trail until he came to the great cavern ; and, although it was now night, the cavern shone with a light as of day, by reason of the golden shine of the Hoard.

So he set Andvari's ring on his finger and dight upon his body the golden mail and upon his head the helmet of darkness, and, putting the Hoard into two chests, he fastened them upon the back of Grane, being minded to walk himself because of their weight. But Grane stirred not, and Sigurd

was troubled what he should do, for even he dared not snite the horse. Then he looked into the eyes of Grane and knew what was in his mind, so he gathered up the reins and leaped upon his back, and the grey horse tossed his mane for joy and galloped over the Waste, turning southward, steady and untiring.

VIII

The Waking of Brynhild

BY stony ways rode Sigurd southward towards the Frankish land, and as he came over Hindfell he saw before him a mountain whereon a great fire burned, and in the midst of the fire a castle with a floating banner, with shields around the towers.

And he climbed that mountain until he came close to the fire, and the crackling heat of it fanned his curls. Then he cried unto Grane, and the brave grey horse, with one mighty spring, leaped through the flame and stood at the castle gate, and Sigurd, looking back, saw only a line of grey ashes where the fire had been.

The castle door stood wide, and Sigurd, with Gram unsheathed, strode through the empty courts. Upon a rock in the inmost hall lay a man in full armour, his face covered by his visor. Then Sigurd cried aloud :

“ Arise ! I am Sigurd.”

But the figure moved not ; so, with the point of Gram, he loosed the mail coat and flung it off, and the string of the helmet and cast it aside, and behold ! there lay before him, in deep sleep, the fairest



Arise! I am Sigurd,



woman he had ever seen. Gold was her hair as the hoard of Andvari, white was her skin as the froth of sea waves, and her opening eyes were blue as a mountain tarn.

"Who waketh me?" she asked, low and soft as in a dream. "Me, in whom Odin, All-Father, set the sleep-thorn because I did as he willed not. Is it thou, Sigurd, son of Sigmund, with Fafnir's Bane in thy hand, and Fafnir's helmet on thy head?"

"It is I," he answered; "tell me thy name."

"I am Brynhild, Valkyr of Odin. Against his word did I give the victory to the man he would not; therefore did he strike me with his sleep-thorn and lay me within the fire-ring. And this doom is laid upon me, that never more shall I choose the slain; that now am I mortal and must suffer my tale of woe, even as the children of men; that I shall wed but a mortal and bear the bitter things of life. But this have I vowed—since I must wed—I will lay my hand only in that of a man who knows no fear."

"Surely," said Sigurd, "thou art both fair and wise. Tell me of wisdom and love during this day that I may spend with thee."

And Brynhild told him of the secret runes of the gods and of many things hidden from men. Through this and through his knowledge of bird-speech became Sigurd wise above all men.

Now when the day was ended the Volsung stood before the Valkyr, and in that deep voice like unto the music of a mountain torrent said:

"I am he that knoweth no fear. I swear that thou, Brynhild, art near to my heart, and none will I wed but thee."

And by the two hands he held her, looking deep into her eyes, as she answered :

“Thee do I choose before all the sons of men, O Sigurd.”

So they plighted their troth and drank of the love drink, and he set upon her finger the red-gold ring of Andvari. And thus began the Valkyr's sorrow ; yet, having the love of the best of the Volsungs, would she not change it for aught of mortal joy.

Now when the new day was come, Sigurd arose and clad him in the golden armour of the Hoard, whereon was drawn the image of that dragon which he slew, and upon his red-gold hair he set the helmet with its dragon crest.

“Fair love !” he said, kissing Brynhild between the eyes, “I must fare forth to do the deeds that await me and to meet the fate that is set. Yet ere long will I seek thee in thy sister's home at Hlymdal, and at my coming shall we have much joy.”

But Brynhild sorrowed and answered low :

“Woe is me, my hero ; for thee and me will be no bridal until our death-day join us. Thou wilt wed a daughter of the southland folk. We must dree our weird apart.”

Then Sigurd laughed and kissed her, saying :

“Sweetheart, thou art sad at our parting. Thou, daughter of the gods, knowest full well that what will be must be, and naught can mortals change when the Nornir have spoken.”

And again he kissed her and rode down through the valley—Golden Sigurd in the sunbeam glint—and Brynhild watched him till she could see him no more. Then she turned and wept the tears of a mortal woman for the first time, and made her ready to go to Hlymdal.

Now in Hlymdal dwelt Heimar, a noble chief, who had wedded Beckhild, sister to Brynhild and Atli. Thither to his home came Brynhild to pass the time of her waiting for Sigurd to come.

One day as she sat in her tower there came running her maiden, who said :

“ See ! who cometh over the hills with this train of men and horses ? ”

And Brynhild looked forth and sighed heavily. “ It is Gudrun, daughter of Gjuki, King of the Niblungs, and her coming brings me woe. ”

Then went she down to greet Gudrun, fairest maiden of Frankenland, and give her welcome. But Gudrun was sad and heavy of heart as they sat in the high-seat together, and Brynhild said :

“ Canst thou not laugh and be merry as we used of old, O Gudrun ? ”

“ That can I not for dreams that trouble me, ” answered Gudrun ; “ even for that am I come to thee that thou mightest unravel all for me. ”

And Brynhild led her to her tower and set her in the high-seat, saying unto her, “ Say on ; ” but she sat herself at Gudrun’s feet with hidden face.

And Gudrun spoke :

“ Thou and I, Brynhild, were with other women at the hunting of a golden stag ; but I alone could come anigh it. Then didst thou shoot and kill it even at my knees, so that sorrow was my portion and grief my fate for evermore. And in the stead of my golden stag gavest thou me a wolf-cub covered with my brother’s blood. ”

And the Valkyr answered gloomily :

“ The rede of this is that thou shalt wed Sigurd, my betrothed, yet not by guile of thine. Guiltless shalt thou be, and he and I also. Yet this is our

doom and naught can stay it, and great shall be the sorrow of us all. For he shall not live, though woe is me that I should be his death-dealer ! and, with him dead, thou shalt be wife to my brother Atli. He shall slay thy brethren, and him shalt thou slay in turn. Thus the end of us all shall be woe and strife and the Twilight of the Gods."

"And is there no help?" asked Gudrun, with down-bent head.

"There is no help, since the Nornir have spoken," Brynhild replied; and, rising from the feet of Gudrun, she passed into her chamber, and all was sadness in the tower.

Then did Gudrun wend home to the Rhineland to wait for Sigurd and her fate; but Brynhild shut herself into her tower to work, in silks and gold, the Slaying of the Worm upon Sigurd's banner, and as the great coils grew and took shape under her fingers, so drew nearer the day of Sigurd's coming.

Then, after a winter in far lands, and the gaining of much fame, came the Golden Sigurd to Hlymdal to his betrothed. Sweet were the days of their love and life together, but all too few; for Brynhild, knowing the word of the Nornir, that soon he must pass to the land of the Franks even as it was decreed, bade him go forth to do mighty deeds, to help those in need, and to bear his great name scatheless as it had ever been.

So went forth Sigurd to his doom, and Brynhild in bitter sorrow, hied her back to dreary Hindfell there to await the fate she must needs not hinder.

IX

Gudrun

IN the heart of the Rhineland lay the mighty city of Worms, home of the Niblung race. There in her rose-garden dwelt Gudrun, fair daughter of Gjuki, with her mother Grimhild, and her three brothers, Gunnar, the king, Guttorm, and Hogni.

Gunnar, the king, was powerful and rich, having hoards of gold and many brave warriors at his command ; but chief of his treasures was his sister, Gudrun, the white-armed.

In quiet she walked one day, with her nurse, in the rose-garden beside the swirling river, when there came from the city a noise of great shouting.

"Go, nurse," she said, "and learn what this may mean. To me it seemeth a cry of joy."

The nurse went, and returned quickly saying :

"It is Sigurd, Fafnir's Bane, the golden hero of the Volsungs. Thy brethren ride forth to greet him at the northern gate. Come, nurseling, that I may braid thy brown hair, and array thee in the gold of the Niblungs, for there will be feasting and welcome in the high-hall this night."

But Gudrun tarried, wistful, under the service trees of her garden with a foreboding of fate to come and of the end of her childhood's life.

Then throughout the Rhineland flew the word :

"The hero of the ages hath come ;" and from far and wide came folk to greet the dragon-slayer, master of Andvari's hoard, now returned once more to its Rhineland home.

In the high-hall, Gunnar, the king, held a feast,

and near him sat his mother. Her bright witch-eyes looked upon Sigurd, and she pondered :

“ If this man wed my daughter, naught should I have to fear for her from Atli and the wild kings of the East, any one of whom would wed her. He is troth-plighted to Brynhild, the Valkyr, but that is naught. Have I not witch-lore to make him forget her ? So also should we keep the golden hoard here in the Rhineland again.”

So all that summer, while Sigurd hunted, played, rode, and waged war for the Niblungs did Grimhild wander among the mountains, brewing the magic draught of forgetfulness.

And the brethren loved Sigurd, and with all their lords was he in fellowship, save only with Hagen of Hunland, friend of Atli, whose deeds were evil, and who hated all that was brightest and best. So when the king prayed the hero to tarry throughout winter, he agreed, thinking : “ In the spring will I fetch my Valkyr maiden home.”

But one autumn night, when all were weary with hunting, and with the feast, came Grimhild bearing an ancient cup of gold to Sigurd, and, gazing with witch eyes that faltered not into the keenness of his eyes, said :

“ In this cup I pledge thee, thou hero that shalt be my fourth son. Drink and see the desire of thy life.”

And Sigurd looked straight at her with his guileless glance, and, taking the cup, drained it to the bottom.

Then fell a greyness upon his face, and all men were silent. He stood up and gazed around, unseeing ; then, as one unmindful of his fellows, strode from the hall and was seen no more that night.

But Grimhild rejoiced, for she knew that her spell was strong.

In the morning, as Gudrun plucked service berries and late roses in her garden, there came to her the Volsung, as one in a dream. She was pale with the thought of his sorrow, though she knew not what had befallen him, and, letting fall her flowers, she held out to him her two white hands. Then he, seeing how fair she was, and Brynhild having passed from his mind, felt that with this maiden to love him, this strange nameless trouble of his mind would pass, and all would be well; therefore took he her hands, saying:

“Gudrun, if troth may be plighted between us, here will I abide. But if, Daughter of the Niblungs, thou hast no love for me, then will I ride hence to-day. Say thou, shall I stay?”

And she, bending down her rose-flushed face, bade him stay, and he swore a mighty oath that never, while life was in him, would he forget her love.

So, hand in hand, they passed to the hall of the Niblungs, and a shout of joy went up from the chiefs of the land. And Gunnar swore blood-brotherhood with Sigurd, and they made haste to set forth the wedding feast; then did the crafty queen rejoice that all had fallen out according to her plan, and that the stolen Rhine-gold was once more safe in the Rhineland.

So Gudrun and Sigurd dwelt together in love, and the hero gave her to eat of the heart of Fafnir, and she, being of great soul, became nobler and wiser than all living women, save only the lost Brynhild. And then was born to them a son who was called Sigmund.

And now did Grimhild, the plotter, turn her thoughts to that sad Valkyr sitting bereft in her lonely tower at Hlymdal, broidering the deeds of her lost hero, and she said to Gunnar :

“Who so fit a wife for thee, my son, as Brynhild, daughter of Budli and sister of Atli of Hunland ?”

And Gunnar, being willing, made ready to ride to Hlymdal, and Sigurd with him. Yet, ere they left, the witch queen called them unto her and taught them how each might take the other's shape. This seemed a thing of sport to the Volsung, and, laughing his great laugh, he cried :

“Good mother and queen, wherefore do we need this witch-work ? They say this Brynhild is now but a mortal maiden and needs but a mortal wooing ?”

“Thou knowest not what may befall,” said the queen, “therefore heed well my runes.”

So they went forth, Sigurd wotting little that these runes would bring him nearer to his doom, and rode merrily to Hlymdal.

And Heimar greeted them gladly and bade them tell their errand. Then Gunnar spoke :

“For the asking of Brynhild am I come. Thinkest thou, Heimar, that she would wed with me and become queen of the Rhineland ?”

“That can I not answer,” quoth Heimar, “for no longer is she here, but back to Hindfell hath she fared. Strange and sad hath she been of late, but she holdeth fast to the rune of Odin, that only with the fire-rider will she wed—since wed she must.”

“No fire fear I !” cried Gunnar.

“But thy horse,” asked Heimar, “will he face

fire? since ride must thou, even as ye would ride to Odin in Valhalla."

"That shall we see," cried Gunnar, doubting naught.

X

The Wedding of Brynhild

JOYOUSLY they rode over hill and dale until they came to the castle upon Hindfell, and round it still rose the quivering white flame.

For awhile they looked, then the mighty Gunnar, drawing his sword, and shouting the war-cry of the Niblungs, rushed at the flame. But his horse, being afraid, swerved and turned, and fled trembling back to the troop of men.

Then said Hogni, the wise:

"Sigurd, lend thou thy Grane, he feareth naught."

"That will I," said Sigurd, leaping to earth, "though I doubt me Grane will let none back him but myself."

And it was even so, for although King Gunnar mounted, no step would the grey horse stir. He stood like a rock in the pathway, save only that he turned his eyes to Sigurd as if to cry him shame in that he had let another back him.

Then Sigurd drew near and spoke low to the king:

"This must the queen, thy mother, have foreseen. So must I take thy shape and ride for thee, my brother in love, through the fire to woo thee Brynhild."

Then in the gloaming were the magic runes spoken, and Sigurd, in the likeness of Gunnar,

sprang swift through the circling fire ; and the fire died into grey ashes, and throughout the cold night did Gunnar and Hogni wait and watch for the Volsung.

But Sigurd strode through the silent halls until he reached the inner one, wherein, on the high-seat, sat the swan-maiden waiting, on her head a crown of gold, and on her white dress her arms lying listless.

Only her eyes of burning blue looked straight into those of the seeming Gunnar, and on her sad face was the woe of the hapless waiting for Sigurd, who came not.

And the seeker spake not, for his heart was cold with the weight of her sorrow, only he stood and gazed for a space.

Then the Valkyr cried :

“Who art thou who comest through the fire to disquiet me in my weariness?”

“I am Gunnar, King of the Niblungs, come to hold thee to thine oath and woo thee.”

“Art thou indeed the first and best of men?” she asked, and her eyes sought his, in her heart-hunger for Sigurd.

“I am he,” he answered, with bent head, “and thou, Valkyr, shalt never be forsworn. This night must we be wed.”

Then the swan-maid arose in her beauty and greeted the king, saying :

“An thou be first of men, thou shalt be my king. Sit thou in my seat and take my troth-plight with this ring.”

And she drew off the ring of Andvari and set it upon his finger. So came the Fate back to Sigurd.

And when morning was come they parted, the kings to ride homewards, and Brynhild to go to Heimar's home until the day of her journey to Worms.

Then was a mighty feast made, and great was the joy of Grimhild that her children were now mated with the best and most beautiful that the world held.

Many days did the great feast last, and of a sudden, at its ending, the mist rolled back from the spirit of Sigurd, and he remembered the vows that he sware unto the Valkyr. And he fled from that company in sorrow of heart, and knew not where he stood until he came through Gudrun's rose-garden to the Rhine bank. Dark and swift and sullen flowed the river, and Sigurd stretched out his hands and cried :

"Forsworn, dishonoured, I the Volsung! Thou curse of the ring, thou bane of the gold! Will naught be well until thou liest again in the arms of the waiting Rhine daughters?"

And he cast himself down amidst the flowers by the swishing black water, and so lay until the dawn. But when he arose his face shone with the golden light of peace; he spake unto no man of these things, but ever loved Gudrun the more, since no fault of hers was this sorrow; and he dwelt in friendship with Brynhild as a brother might.

But three winters went by, and Brynhild hated Gudrun each year the more, and pondered through long months how she might be revenged for the stealing of her love. No peace had she, but by night she wandered abroad calling on Sigurd, that should be her love for all the ages, and by day she sought, with bitter words and taunts, to humble

Gudrun; but Gudrun, happy in the love of Sigurd, bore all and complained not.

Only her heart failed her in that she knew that Grimhild longed for the gold of Sigurd, and that Hogni, her brother, joined her mother in this longing. Therefore kept she watch and ward lest hurt should come to her great husband, although she knew what was known to no other—that the blood of Fafnir, covering him, had made him safe from wounds, save only in the spot between his shoulders, where had lodged the dead leaf; there alone might he be stricken.

Now, it chanced one day that the sister queens went to the bathing, and as they went Brynhild, well-nigh distraught with longing, flouted Gudrun even more than her wont, and the queen of the brown eyes grew wroth.

As she took place by Brynhild, the swan-queen cast on her a scornful glance and moved higher up the flood.

Then did Gudrun swim after her, asking: "Why shouldst thou shun me, and move higher up?"

"Because thy place is below me," Brynhild cried, with a face of white wrath. "Thou, sister of Gunnar, as thou art—art but the wife of King Hjaalprek's thrall, a war-won slave. In days to come, when Gunnar and I sit with Odin in Valhalla, thou and thy slave husband shall wait without the gates. Could thy Sigurd have ridden the flaming fire?"

"Peace!" cried Gudrun, rising glorious in her anger, "who art thou that thou shouldst scorn the slayer of Fafnir and Regin, and many kings who wrought evil. Moreover"—she went on, in low, deep tones—"my Sigurd was it who rode

the flaming fire on Grane and claimed thee for Gunnar. To Sigurd didst thou give the ring of Andvari, and here is it yet, set upon my finger."

She stretched forth her fair hand whereon shone the red-gold ring, and Brynhild went grey as a drift cloud. She cast one look of hate upon the Niblung queen, and, throwing her garments around her, sped to the wild wood and was seen no more that day.

But in the Mirk Wood found she Hagen, the evil one—a Hun and friend to Atli, her brother—who had been setting cunning traps for the wild things that run, and he said :

"What ails our golden queen? Can aught that I may do aid her?"

Then Brynhild burst forth with her hatred of the Volsung, crying :

"Help me with my vengeance !"

Then Hagen saw that through the queen he might perchance work evil unto the hero, whom he hated (as all wicked things hate what is good and brave and strong), and perchance compass his death, so that Atli might have Gudrun, whom he wished for to wife, and Hogni the Golden Hoard that he so coveted, whereof part also might come to Hagen ; so he said slowly :

"This thing needs thought, but between us we may work it. Get thee home and show no anger at the tale."

But this Brynhild could not do. White and stony she rose up and lay down, speaking no word to the king nor to her maidens.

But after awhile Hagen sent this message to her—that naught of her vengeance might be begun while

she lay in her chamber alone, and he bade her come forth and be friends with Gudrun. So she came forth, heavy-eyed, and Gudrun met her with fair words, saying :

“ Dear sister, let all be as if we had never striven by the Rhine. Flout no more, but let us dwell in peace.”

So Brynhild, with the stone-cold heart and false lips, kissed the Volsung’s wife and there was quiet.

But those two who hated Sigurd, and Hogni who coveted his treasure, drew together and made a plot ; but they told not Gunnar and Guttorm, for the kings were true to their oath of brotherhood, and would have slain the plotters rather than they should work Sigurd’s woe.

XI

The Betraying of Sigurd

AND so the dreary autumn days sped on, and over the hearts of all lay a dim foreboding of evil at hand, and Brynhild, waxing thin, went heavily through the castle, white and still, with deep fire burning in her eyes.

To none was the evil known, save only to Sigurd through the sayings of Gripir the wise, and the death-word of Fafnir. Oft talked he with sweet Gudrun, as they sat in their chamber, where she loved to comb his red-gold locks—striving to prepare her for the sorrowful days in store.

But, though her heart believed, her mind would not, and she repeated ever that naught could harm him, since he had bathed in the dragon’s blood.

"Thou mindest not that one spot," said Sigurd gravely.

"But it is so small a spot, dear heart, and none knows of it but I," and she laid her finger on that place.

Then Sigurd took her into his arms to kiss her, saying: "I would, my sweet, that it might be so."

But they wist not that a maiden of Brynhild was hidden behind the hangings and had noted all.

One day it fell out that the queens sat in their bower together. Gudrun and her maidens were broidering a banner for Sigurd, and swiftly the awesome grey coils of the dragon took shape under their fingers, growing apace as they laid on the gleaming red gold. But Brynhild, too sick at heart to work, sat idly by, tangling the silken skeins as the maidens laid them down by Gudrun, and scattering the ivory needles with restless, fluttering fingers.

Raising suddenly her heavy lids, she flashed a look upon Gudrun and said:

"Thy thrall husband is in peril."

Gudrun flushed red as she looked up, but speaking low, she only said:

"This insult is unworthy of thee, my sister; hast thou forgotten?"

"Forgotten?" cried she wildly, "will the gnawing worm of love and shame at my heart ever die? I tell thee, Sigurd is bound to perish by the plots of evil men, unless thou show me that one spot where he may be struck. If thou wilt do this I will bid my trustiest man-at-arms keep watch and ward over him."

This she said being set on by Hagen, the Hun, for none knew, save Gudrun, where this spot lay.

"Sigurd holdeth watch and ward for himself," said Gudrun proudly; "nathless, sister, I thank thee for thy care."

Thus Brynhild failed, and with slow, dragging steps, passed from the bower. But there stole after her her dark-browed maiden, sister to Hagen, who, touching her, said:

"I, O queen, can show thee this spot; for, being one day within hearing, Gudrun and Sigurd spoke of this spot."

"It is well," said the queen, "mark thou the place on the shirt that he shall wear to-morrow at the great hunt."

And on the morrow when all were gathered joyously in the castle-yard for the hunting of the boar, a small red mark was set between the shoulders of Sigurd, and Hagen and Brynhild laughed grimly, for now they knew that the hero was delivered into their hands for his undoing. But Sigurd held Gudrun long in his arms and kissed her, saying:

"Farewell, thou brave, true heart; bear thee well through the sorrow of heavy years to come, for in naught may we gainsay the Nornir. Yet shall we meet at last in Asgard, and our sorrow have an end."

Then Gudrun knew that nevermore should she speak with her love, but, daughter of kings, she bore herself bravely, looking steadfastly into his eyes as he turned away.

The hunt set forth, and she went to her bower, chill at heart, but Brynhild mocked her crying:

"Thy hero will see fine sport to-day."

XII

The Rhinegold's End

ALL through the day the hunt went on in the wild wood, and Hagen kept at Sigurd's back, biding his time to strike. But Gunnar, feeling something amiss, kept ever by his side also.

Then it chanced that, heated with the chase, they came to a running stream, and Sigurd leaped to earth to drink. As he stooped Gunnar came up, being also athirst, and Sigurd drew back that the king should drink first.

"Nay, brother Sigurd," quoth the great king, "drink thou with me as brethren should."

So they stooped and drank together, and the evil Hagen, stealing up behind, with one fell stroke of his spear on the small red spot, laid low the glory of the world, the Golden Sigurd.

Then rang through the wood two wild and terrible cries; the cry of King Gunnar for his brother foully slain, and the cry of Hagen, whom Grane had seized and bitten so that he died.

And the hunters came together in grief and pain, and raising the body of their hero, they laid it on a bed of spears and bore it back in gloom to the city.

And as they passed along in silence, a chill wind moaned through the pine tops, the robin ceased its autumn song; the ruddy leaves fell swift and thick from the beech trees; winter came in one breath over the land, and all things living mourned Sigurd, dead, even as they had mourned Baldur, the shining god.

But Hagen, the traitor, was left a prey to the beasts of the Mirk Wood.

At two windows of the castle waited and watched the two queens.

And as the dreary train came in sight and she saw the bent heads of all, and Grane, riderless, behind the bier, Gudrun gave one shuddering cry of "Sigurd!" and fell senseless to the ground. But Brynhild caught a torch from the wall, and going down to the courtyard gazed on the face of the dead Sigurd with a laugh of triumph.

Then Gunnar spoke in anger:

"Woe unto thee, thou evil woman; get thee to thy chamber, and joy not that the light of the earth is quenched."

But Brynhild spoke no word; she cast aside the torch and, going to her chamber, laid herself with her face to the wall, and death was in that face.

And all through that night the Niblungs laboured and built a mighty pyre for the Volsung. By the will of Gudrun was it that it stood in the midst of her rose-garden, for she said: "What pleasure more shall I have now that the light of my life is laid low?"

And at the dawn the bale was ready, and Gudrun kissed her love once more upon the mouth ere they lifted him thereon, and behold! at his side lay Grane, dead. What use in life to Grane, wanting Sigurd? Could Sigurd ride to Valhalla wanting Grane? Him also did they lay with gentle hands upon the bale beside Gram, the gift of Odin, and at their feet two hawks.

Then, when all was lighted, forth came Brynhild, decked with gold and jewels, and bearing in her arms the body of young Sigmund, son of Sigurd and Gudrun, whom she had slain.

Terrible was she as she climbed upon the pyre

and looked down on the face of the dead Sigurd in its peace and beauty. And with the weight of her weird her heart strings snapped and she fell dead across the body of the hero she had loved and slain.

So passed Sigurd, hero of the ages, king of the true heart. But his name and his deeds passed not away, nor ever shall so long as the earth endures.

But the sorrows of woe-worn Gudrun ended not here. A weary life, 'mid storm of battle and fierce men was hers. Ere her days of mourning for Sigurd were overpast came Atli, King of the Huns, and brother of Brynhild, to wed her—moved in part by vengeance for his sister and in part by coveting of the Golden Hoard; and she must fare forth, poor lonely one, to live among the evil Eastern men, and there did she die after years of untold sorrow. But the Hoard did her brethren sink into the Rhine, lest Atli should seize it; so came it back to the arms of the waiting Rhine daughters, that, being quit of the fateful gold, the earth should find rest.

And even unto this day, at whiles, may their sweet song of joy be heard as they float, watching over the treasure of Sigurd.

VÖLUND, THE SMITH

ONCE, long ago, there lived in Finmark, a king who had three sons, Völund, Slagfridr, and Egil, to whom sport and the chase were the best things in life. Skilful were they in wrestling, swimming, and running on their snow-shoes or skates of bone, which they named ice-legs. But most of all did they love the chase, and to the end that they might enjoy it more, they built themselves a hut in Ulfdale, on the shore of the Wolf's Water, and here did they dwell for the most part.

Now Völund, being somewhat lame, could not always go with his brethren on the longer winter chase; therefore, at times would he stay in the hut and fashion wondrous jewels of gold and bright stones, as he had been taught by the mountain dwarfs of Finmark, who, for his father's sake held him in great friendship. And his skill was lauded in all the lands where the Norsemen sailed, and even down to Miklagard¹ on the shores of the Middle Sea. Yet would Völund never work for gold, but only for love of beautiful fashionings and for friendship, so that his much-sought work was hard to come by.

Now, it fell one day in the soft spring time, when the larch tassels tossed their red and green in the whispering breeze, and Baldur's-Eye crept out,

¹ Constantinople.

sweet-blue, to meet the sun, that Völund came back from many days' wanderings among the bare black mountains. Glad at heart was he, for the berg-trolls had sent him word of a marvellous jewel of green and blue and purple and wondrous burning fire, that lay hidden in crevices of dull brown rock, and after much searching he had found it. In his leathern pouch it lay, pebbles like unto naught but the rainbow bridge of Asgard that is guarded by Heimdal of the golden teeth; and Völund's mind was full of thought of how he should use the stones. As he passed through the forest, near to Wolf's Water, he heard the voices of his brothers returning from the hunt, and together they made their way towards the hut, talking as they went. But, as the path got clearer and the light showed through the edge-most trees, the brethren stayed their steps and looked one at another, for there was sound of voices and laughter from the water-side, and, walking stealthily, they peered forth and beheld three maidens sitting on the golden sand in the morning sunlight. They had bathed, for their feet were bare and their hair fell round them unbound, and beside them lay three dresses of swan's feathers of dazzling white.

Then the brethren knew that these must be the Valkyrja, Odin's choosers of the slain, and princesses, and they went forth to speak with them. The maidens sat spinning flax and looked up, smiling, as the king's sons drew near.

"A fair morrow to ye, hunters," said the first, whose hair was black as Odin's ravens, "and good sport. I am Hladgrun, daughter of King Hlödvir, and she with brown locks is my sister Alvit; we are the foster-sisters of golden-haired Olrun, who

is the daughter of King Kar, our father's friend. From All-Father got we leave to fly to Wolf's Water, for the fame of its golden sand and deep blue water has travelled far, and here would we bide, at least for a while."

Then the brethren bade them welcome, and made them couches of their finest skins, and the maidens abode there until it fell out that Egil married Orlun, and Slagfidr Hladgrun, and Völund chose Alvit of the soft brown hair.

Great was their weal during many years, for the warrior women followed the chase with their husbands, and when Völund abode at home, Alvit stayed with him and helped in the welding of rings, joying in the blending of the marvellous stones.

Now, when seven years were forebye, there came a shadow over the homes by Wolf's Water. The Valkyrja grew pale and still; in the eighth year drew they the swan-feather dresses forth from the great chests where they were hidden, and preened them on the yellow sands in the sun.

To Egil and Slagfidr this became a jest:

"Wives, will ye fly away as ye came?" they asked; "and shall we need to seek ye in Asgard?"

Only to Völund was it earnest, as he worked and thought; and he said one day, looking deep into Alvit's eyes:

"Wife of mine, is there aught in thy mind that thou hast not told me?"

And she answered sighing:

"Völund, ever is it the Valkyrja's weird that they must go when Odin calls."

"And wilt thou return no more? Wilt thou forget?"

"Never shall I forget; yet of my return I may

not speak, since the future is hidden from me. But, Völund, All-Father is merciful and kind, and of a surety we may hope."

So Völund went about his work and made no sign, nor said he aught.

One winter's day, when he and his brethren returned from hunting there was no answer to their call; the huts were empty and the swan-feather garments gone.

Then told he all unto the others:

"With Valkyrja were we wed, therefore must we suffer; for to Odin do they first owe fealty, and who are we that we should contend against the gods?"

"Odin has many choosers of the slain," said Egil gloomily; "we each had but our chosen one. Surely this is scant justice?"

"Justice or not," cried Slagfidr, "I go to seek Hladgrun, even to the foot of Odin's seat."

"And I with you," said Egil.

"Such journeyings as thine are not for me, my brethren, since I should but hinder ye in your going. Therefore, here will I abide, to keep the home and welcome them should they return. Here is gold for your plenishing and weapons of the best, that I have wrought. Go forth in peace, and come not back alone."

So the two did on their snow-shoes, and clad themselves in their warmest skin-coats, to set forth on their long travels, but Völund stood by the hut door to watch, as Egil turned towards the east, and Slagfidr towards the north; and he watched until the crisp noise of their footfalls on the snow died away in the forest; then he turned to his lonely work and sighed.

So he sat, always by the open door, making precious rings of gold for Alvit, always for Alvit; and when fifty were finished he strung them upon a thread of grass, until they numbered seven hundred in all, and no two were alike.

Now it came to pass that Nithudr of Sweden, a wicked king, who worked but evil in the land, heard of the fame of the Smith's gold work, and sent unto him saying:

"Give me of thy work, rings and a necklace and a beaker, and for these shalt thou have much gold."

But Völund sent back word:

"Gold have I in plenty; and the work of my brain and hand is not for thee."

Then was the king angered; but his evil wife, who desired these things greatly, said:

"Speak him fair, O Nithudr, so may we yet come at them."

And Nithudr sent again, saying:

"Choice furs have I, such as are sought after vainly even by the kings of the south. From my hoard shalt thou choose all that thou wilt, so that thou give me but my wish."

"Furs have I in greater store than Nithudr," said Völund, "both black and grey, and white and sable. With these can he not tempt me. Leave me in peace."

When the messengers brought back this word, Nithudr was so wroth that all trembled, and he bade armed men go to Wolf's Water, and take Völund and his treasure, and bring them before him.

At midday came the men to the hut, and found all still and the door wide open, as Völund was wont to leave it lest Alvit should return. And



The Men of Sweden came creeping forth.

they entered, and, seeing the rows of shining rings hanging by the wall on their threads of twisted grass, they took one, then hid in the forest until the Smith should return.

Woe unto Völund ! no bergtroll came, friendly-wise, to warn him of the foe so close ; no Valkyr wife called to him out of the fleecy white clouds to shun the home-hut, and at eve came he back, dreaming of Alvit.

As always, after an absence, he counted his rings, and fast did his heart beat when he made the tale but six hundred and ninety-nine. Once and again he went through them, and he said :

“ It must even be that Alvit is here ; for sport hath she taken the ring and hidden herself.”

In haste did he light a fire of crackling fir-cones, for the night was chill, that the ruddy gleam from the open door might lure her home ; and oft did he stand without to pierce the gloom ; but all was dark and silent, and to his cry of “ Alvit ! ” came no answer.

Then set he bear’s flesh to roast—a portion for two—and sat him on the rug to count once more the rings ; and as he sat heavy sleep came upon him, and he fell back dreaming of Alvit.

And the men of Sweden came creeping forth, their shields shining in the cold moonlight, and fear was in their hearts, for some said that Völund knew the magic of the runes, and could weave them as he would ; and they took him sleeping, set his legs in iron fetters, so that when he came to himself he was prisoner, and was carried bound to Nithudr.

The wicked king rejoiced greatly that a man so dowered should be prisoner to his hand, and bade the men set Völund before him. Weary and heart-

sick, the Smith sat upon the ground before the king's seat, for, by reason of the heavy fetters and his lameness, and the long journey from Wolf's Dale, could he no more keep upright.

And Nithudr taunted him with bitter words.

"Thief! have I got thee at last?" he cried. "How long have I borne that thou shouldst come unawares, under seeming of the chase, and steal my gold?"

But Völund sat with bent head, and made no sign.

Once and again the king mocked him, and at length he spoke:

"Who art thou," he said, "that darest to fetter a king's son?"

"When a king's son is but a common robber he meets but a robber's fate," said Nithudr.

"By help of my troll-friends is my gold found," said Völund, "and none of it is gained in thy land, O king; therefore let me go back to Wolf Dale."

"Never shalt thou win back until thou hast given me my desire. A ring I have, since my thralls brought it to me, thy sword shall I take now, since it is the work of Völund, the Smith, and none there is like unto it; but I still lack the necklace and beaker. Give me these and thou goest free."

But Völund answered sullenly:

"Kill me if thou wilt, but my work is for my friends, and thou art my bitter enemy."

Then knew not Nithudr what to do, and he was minded to let Völund go, for he feared the King of Finmark and the bergtrolls, who loved Völund.

But the wicked queen would not, for above all

she desired a necklace of the rainbow stones of which the fame had gone abroad, and she said :

“It is well for thee, Nithudr, for thou hast the Smith’s mighty sword, and to Bodvild our daughter hast thou given the ring—but what have I? It seemeth to me that he is a man of craft, as are all forest-dwellers, and so long as thou hast his sword will there be no peace with him in our steadng. Lame him still further, so that he can never flee away, and put him on the Island of the Salt Farm, then can he work all that thou wilt.”

And this shameful thing was done as she had said, and Völund was set upon the island alone, with gold of the Swedish king; and, because of his loneliness and misery, he wrought for Nithudr many wondrous things, yet over all murmured he runes that ill should befall all, who owned these treasures. At times there came upon him mighty wrath and despair, so that he smote upon his anvil with such force that it crumbled as if it had been clay; then must he weld another anvil ere he could work again, and as he welded he sang :

“ Alack ! for the sword, my companion,
Alack ! for the steel I forged and ground ;
Now it has passed to an alien,
My faithful friend hangs at Nithudr’s belt.
Lost to me is its brightness,
Nevermore will the runes on its blade
Whisper to me of their magic !
Alack ! for the ring of my fashioning,
Alack ! for the glory of Alvit ;
To an earth-maid hath it been given,
My Valkyr is lost, is lost as my life,
For no end is there now to my sorrow ! ”

So each day did he dream more of vengeance, and each day became he more gloomy and sullen,

until, after many weeks, there came this hope of revenge, although for long was it delayed.

Two young sons had Nithudr, brethren of Bodvild, the princess. And it fell out one day that the boys, looking out over the sea, spoke together of the Island and the prisoner thereon.

"Bodvild hath said that she weeps for him and his dreary fate. She hath begged our father to let her go and visit him," said the younger.

"Aye," said the elder, "but she is a fool. Our mother saith that he is evil and good for naught but to make us jewels and swords. Could we not go over and seize his treasure ere it come to our father and mother? So should we be rich for ourselves and not beholden to the king and queen. For our mother saith he is a constant danger, and when she hath gathered enough treasure from him she will send thralls to slay him."

"And Bodvild crieth shame upon her, and our mother, being angry that Bodvild will not give up the ring of Alvit, hath put her away in the inmost room of the house."

"That matters naught to us," said the elder; "gold must we have if we would be powerful, and here is gold for the taking, and only a lame man's life between."

Whereby it will be seen that evil parents have evil children, and Bodvild alone was mild and merciful.

Then the youths sought cunningly how they might get a boat to cross to the Island of the Salt Farm, yet must they be very wary since Nithudr and the queen doubted of every man—as is the way of the wicked—and ever kept strict watch on the outgoings of all.

But they knew not that Egil, having wandered through the world seeking the Valkyrja, had returned and made his way by night to the Island, where Völund received him gladly, and hid him every day at the coming of Nithudr. And first he asked :

“Comest thou, O brother, with news of my wife?”

“With news, O Völund, but naught of good. Alvit and Hladgrun and Orlun saw I, but it availed nothing, for Odin is wroth because of their long absence, and hath said that, an they will to return and dwell with us, they shall become but mortal women, to dree the weird of mortals, in sorrow and suffering and death. And they have taken counsel together, and their word is that this they could not thole. Life to them is it to ride the clouds and bear the chosen to Valhalla, rather than to suffer the love of us mortal men, and die with us. Slagfidr have I seen and told, and he would that I should sail a-viking with him, but I could not, for thou wert alone and lame, so that I must seek thee according to my promise. He would that we should together seek him in Miklagard where thy gold-work would be much sought.”

But Völund shook his head and said :

“With Alvit went the light of my life. If I leave here—and fain would I do it—back to Wolf’s Dale shall I go, there to abide always. But first must I have vengeance on Nithudr and his wife, in that, by their act, nevermore can I hunt in the forest, and seek for precious stones in their hidden homes.”

To this did Egil agree, but never could they compass a plan for the undoing of Nithudr. And

Egil, for employment and seeing that nevermore might his brother win from the Island unless by flying, bestirred himself to gather swan's feathers wherewith he might weave a dress for Völund, like unto those of the Valkyrja. And the white swans, gathering round at eventide, brought him more feathers, and sang their sweet strange songs to hearten him at his work; and so two winters went by and the Smith was of good heart, for the king knew nought of Egil's presence, since by day he hid in a sand cave on the far side of the Island.

At the end of this time it befell that Bodvild, who dreamed ever of the lonely worker of the Salt Farm, broke the precious ring of Alvit, and, since none could mend it, and she dared not tell her father, she took four thralls and her two maidens at early dawn, while her parents slept, and rowed over to Völund.

And when Völund beheld the fair maiden drawing nigh alone, he went forth to meet her and give her greeting. "I am Bodvild, the king's daughter. O Smith, I come to beg that thou wilt mend my ring," and she showed the ring of Alvit, lying in two pieces in her hand, and Völund, thinking of his false Valkyr, looked so long and hard upon the princess that her face flushed, and she dropped her bright head and waited. Then Völund spoke:

"Thy ring will I mend, O Bodvild, but only at the price of thy love."

"My love is thine," she answered simply, "and has been since the long-past day when, lame and despairing, thou wert brought before my father."

"And if I wed thee, will he be wroth?" asked Völund.

"So wroth that I doubt not he will kill me,

because of my mother's hate of thee. But what matters it if I have thy love?"

"Spoken like a king's daughter," said Völund. "Call in thy maidens and thralls that we may plight our troth."

And he called unto Egil, his brother, that he also should witness; and there, before the seven in the dark smithy, were Völund and Bodvild wed. And he set upon her neck a great golden collar, set with glittering stones. "For," said he, "since rings were made for Alvit, thou shalt have none from me, but arm-rings and necklaces, and girdles and crowns—gold for thy golden hair—as many as thou wilt."

Then Bodvild kissed him on the mouth and went over the sea to her home, but oft at early morn thereafter she sped across to spend what time she might with her husband.

And now came it that Völund often laughed and sang runes over his work, so that Egil said:

"Hast thou a secret joy, O brother, that thou sittest no more in gloom and silence?"

"A joy have I," said Völund, "in that my vengeance draweth nigh. Is thy swan coat finished?"

"In three days will it be ready; but, brother, thou wouldst not hurt Bodvild?"

"Nay, she hath been the first part of my revenge, in that Nithudr would rather that she lay dead than that she should wed me. She is a gentle maid, and will dwell with me at Wolf's Water. Soon will come the viper's spawn, his sons, and my work will be done."

And so it fell out, for, by constant watching, the youths in the end made their way to the smithy

unseen by the king or the queen, and strode in upon Völund as he worked. His great chests stood open, and their greedy eyes beheld the jewels that lay heaped therein.

"Give us of your rings and gold," they cried roughly.

"Go, take what ye will," Völund answered grimly, hammering ever on his anvil.

And, hustling each other in their haste, they ran to the chest and struggled who should take the most. But as they knelt and fought, their heads being within the chest, behold the iron lid came down upon them and cut off their heads.

Then was Völund's revenge fulfilled. He took the skulls of the king's sons and set them in silver as a gift for Nithudr; their eyes and teeth by his runes he changed to stone and set as jewels for the queen.

So came the youths home no more, and therefore had the wicked queen no rest: ever did she wander by the shore and in the birch-woods seeking her sons, who came not; while the king sat in his high-seat waiting gloomily, and Bodvild kept her chamber, and so the days went by.

And one day his wife came to Nithudr and said:
"Wakest thou, Nithudr, King of Sweden?"

"I wake ever," he answered, "for joy hath fled and no more can I sleep by reason of the evil counsel that thou gavest me; for I fear me that by this it is that our young sons have come to their death. I would fain speak with Völund, for it is borne in upon me, that by reason of my cruelty to him has this sorrow come upon me."

"Völund is here," came a voice from above, and going to the door of the high-hall the king saw

Völund, clad in the swan feather dress and holding in his arms Bodvild the princess, high above him in the clouds.

Then the king called aloud :

“Tell me, thou master of runes, hast thou seen my sons?”

“Swear unto me first, by point of sword, by Sleipnir’s mane, by ship of Odin, and by Urda’s fountain, that thou wilt never harm my wife, no matter what her name, nor do hurt to child of mine.”

And Nithudr swore by all these things.

“Then go to the smithy, the prison where thou didst set me, and under the dust in the pit beneath the bellows wilt thou find thy sons. From their skulls hast thou drunk thy mead, round thy queen’s neck hang their teeth and eyes.”

Then the queen shrieked aloud and tore from her neck the fated stones, and the king cried :

“Would that I could take vengeance on thee, O Völund, and on my daughter, but for my oath’s sake I cannot. Neither could aught, save Odin’s ravens, tear thee down, nor could the most cunning archer reach thee in thy clouds. Go with Bodvild, and trouble me no more.”

So Völund, bearing Bodvild, soared away across mountains and forests and tarns to his loved Wolf-Dale; and there they dwelt until their deaths, and they had a son named Vidrek, who became a great hero in after times in the southern lands. And oftentimes came Slagfidr and Egil to talk with them, and show them of their booty; and through their tales was it that the little Vidrek was minded to go forth in search of adventures.

His story is of a later time and cometh not into

this place, but the fame of Völund, the Smith, went forth through all lands so that after many hundred years in far-off countries, even England, did folk still call upon him, when in straits, to do their smith work.

TYRFING, THE MAGIC SWORD

LONG ago there lived in the far North a mighty king named Swarfurlami, whose grandsire had received his kingdom from the hands of Odin, on the condition that he and his descendants should rule justly and wisely. This they did; they were also great warriors and fought valiantly to defend the realm bestowed upon them by the Father of the Gods. Thus when, in his old age, a giant came up against his people and put them to the sword, the father of Swarfurlami went out to conquer him. But the giant was the more powerful and slew the aged king, whereby Swarfurlami came into his kingdom. Knowing that he must avenge his father, he strengthened himself by warlike exercises and games, and in particular by the chase, and for days he would follow his quarry on foot through the snow-bound, ice-clad mountains.

One day, as with his men he sought for game, there ran out of a thicket a great white deer with many-branched horns.

"This is indeed a noble quarry," cried the king, and he set off in hot pursuit. Yet, however fast they went, still faster fled the stag, and, as it went, it seemed to mock them, for at whiles it stopped to watch the hunters, or to crop the grass until they again came close upon it.

This angered the king greatly, and still he followed until the sun set and the moon rose, yet still the stag went on. Then, just at midnight, when again they seemed to be nearer, it disappeared in a cleft in the earth.

Then was Swarfurlami angry, and in his wrath he stamped upon the ground and said: "Even if thou hast gone to the gnomes of the Iron Mountains yet will I have thee;" and behold! there appeared before him out of the cleft two dwarfs. Now, unto the dwarfs of the under-world was given the gift of working in metals. They also knew the secrets of the rocks, the hiding-places of the pale gold that, in their skilful hands, grew red and firm; of the dull jewels that they cut and brightened, and then—for they were tricksey folk that loved to set traps for the strange men of the over-world—laid them in places where they might be found, just to see how these big men prized what were to them but paltry stones.

Yet in some ways were they ever in bondage to men, for, if called upon by their names in certain spots, they were bound to come forth.

Swarfurlami seized upon them, and was about to slay them in his anger, but they begged with piteous cries for mercy, so that at last he said:

"Good! See ye now; scatheless shall ye go if within three days ye forge and bring unto me a sword that shall never miss its blow, that shall cut steel like leather, that shall never rust, and that shall always bring victory to him that hath it in hand."

The dwarfs shook their heads.

"Cunning are we, O king, in working in iron and all metals, yet such a sword not even hath our king forged. Ask of us something less!"

But Swarfurlami would not, and, since one of the dwarfs was the son of the king, they, after much talk aside, gave their promise to redeem their lives with the sword.

“But,” said they, “come thou alone to this spot to fetch it, since with men of the over-world care we not to deal.”

Swarfurlami trusted them, knowing that the word of a dwarf of the Iron Mountains is sacred, and after three days he came again to the cleft and found the two dwarfs sitting on a rock, and between them a sword in a glorious sheath inlaid with gold and the hidden stores of the mountains, so that it shone as summer lightning.

With pride and joy Swarfurlami took it from the small men and was about to unsheath it when the dwarf king's son held up his hand and stopped him.

“Stay, O king!” he said hastily. “Didst thou not ask for a sword that should never miss its blow? This is named Tyrfing, the Slayer, and, once unsheathed, it must have its victim. A fatal gift hast thou chosen, O king! the curse of all thy race, and no peace shall be theirs until Tyrfing rests in the tomb with its victim. On the blade are inscribed runes in the tongue of our nation, and this is the reading of them :

‘Draw me not unless in fray;
Drawn, I pierce, and, piercing, slay.’

Beware, King Swarfurlami, and let us take back the sword.”

But the king laughed joyously and shook his head. He thanked and blessed the dwarfs and took his way over the mountains. The two little

men watched him with grave faces, as the sun glinted on great, glorious Tyrfing shining across his back, for they knew they had let loose a great sorrow upon the world. Then they went back to their underground work of making ready iron and copper and tin for the earth-men to dig for in centuries to come, and left the race of Swarfurlami to the Nornir.

Then was the king blithe, for he had no fear of the wicked giant, but went straightway and challenged and slew the enemy, and took his treasures and his daughter Frida.

Now Frida was both good and beautiful, and sorrowed much for the evil wrought by her father; therefore, Swarfurlami married her, and they lived happily together, but they had no sons and only one daughter named Eyvor. This grieved them, for the lot of a woman alone was but sad when she had no man to fight for her.

The fame of Tyrfing brought peace into the kingdom until Swarfurlami had grown old; then there came word over the mountains of a baresark, young and terrible, named Arngrim, who was making ready to come up against the king. Now the baresarks were dreaded in all lands, since, being wrought up to madness before beginning to fight, they fought not like common men. No rule had they, and none knew how to come at them, and although they fought without mail coats (whereby they gained their name of bare-sarkers) yet they were, for this reason, still more terrible to men who understood not their madness.

Then was Queen Frida sore disquieted, but Swarfurlami spoke bravely to her:

"Fear not, dear wife," he said, "no harm can come to me, holding Tyrfing. Let us send a hearty greeting to this Arngrim and show him that we fear him not."

And the queen sighed heavily and set herself, with Eyvor, to make ready for the baresark. They cooked the best and darkest hams, roasted wild fowls brought in by the men, gathered savoury roots from the fields for stewing, and laid out their finest stores of silver and linen.

At eventide came Arngrim, and the hearts of the queen and princess sank as they noted the mighty girth and strong muscles of the baresark, for they feared them greatly for the good old king.

Next day gathered all men to see the battle. Swarfurlami's first blow with Tyrfing clove the shield of Arngrim, but he smote with such force that Tyrfing stuck in the ground, and before the king could pull it forth Arngrim hewed off his hand, and, seizing the magic sword, killed him.

Then Arngrim took Frida and Eyvor and all the land. As custom was, he married Eyvor and they had twelve sons who were all baresark like their father. Their fury was so great, when the fit was upon them, that they landed at times from their ships to hack and hew the trees and stones, fearing lest, in their madness, they should harm their own followers and fall upon each other.

Arngnim, when his sons went a-viking, had given Tyrfing unto Angantyr, the eldest, and with it he had gained much renown as a slayer of men, and the brethren were greatly feared throughout the coasts of the northern seas.

Now, it was the rule of the sons of Arngrim,

since they loved each other well, that, in the plan of one all should help. When, therefore, Angantyr saw gloom and sadness upon the face of his brother Hjorvaldur, he questioned him, and found that he deeply loved Ingebjorg, daughter of the King of Sweden, whom he had seen at a great gathering of the people.

"Then, brother, why gloom?" quoth Angantyr. "Let us go up to the court of the king at Upsala and ask for the maiden. If he give her peacefully, well; if he refuse, also well. We can take her."

For Angantyr, with Tyrfinn and his brethren at his back, feared naught—not even the high gods upon their seats.

When they came unto the high-hall of Upsala, the king welcomed them with honour, and, after they had feasted well, asked their will. Hjorvaldur, amid the silence of that great company, told his wish. The king sat thinking long, then he turned unto his people and cried:

"Jarls and nobles of my land of Sweden, what say ye to the demand of this baresark?"

Then up rose two friends, Hjalmar, the jarl, and Oddur, wisest of the counsellors, and Oddur spoke:

"O king, there are many of the greatest and best in your realm that love the Princess Ingebjorg; why, therefore, should she wend over seas with a stranger and a baresark, when she may stay midst those who love her?"

"Ingebjorg," said the king gently, "stand forth and choose for thyself thy way of life."

Then, in the deep silence, came forward Ingebjorg, the princess, in her trailing robes of soft blue.

The veil that half hid her sweet face, was held in place by a band of gold upon her curling hair. The tears in her blue eyes fell not, for she bore herself bravely before the hundred faces turned upon her, and in a firm voice, she said :

“I choose to remain with my own people and I take Hjalmar, the jarl, whom I have known all my life, to be my husband.”

Then arose a great shout of joy from the Swedes, and Hjalmar stepped to the side of Ingebjorg.

“You hear, my noble guests,” said the king unto the baresarks, “my girl hath chosen.”

“Then,” said Hjorvaldur, “I challenge Hjalmar and Oddur to holmgang¹ in Samsöe Isle in six months from to-day.”

And the brethren strode from the high-hall, but Ingebjorg grew pale and cold, for she feared for Hjalmar.

Since there was much time to spend before the day of the holmgang, the brethren, who now always sailed alone in a ship as they could not trust themselves with their men in their baresark rage, tarried awhile with a great jarl who had a fair daughter. Angantyr loved Swafa and straightway married her; but the good jarl had sad forebodings of the holmgang in Samsöe, and he dreamed a dream, which he told unto Angantyr and Swafa; and this was his dream.

“I beheld a multitude of birds on a desert island—there came up against them twelve great birds that slew them, so that all perished. Then, while the twelve birds were resting, outworn by their fight, there came two mighty eagles that fell upon

¹ Battle-meeting.

the twelve birds and smote them until they died and one of the eagles died also. If I read aright this means that ye must all perish."

But Angantyr laughed and said :

"Nay, good father, thou canst not have read aright for, holding Tyrfing, none can slay me, at least."

But the jarl shook his head, and he and Swafa bade them a sad farewell as they fared forth to Samsøe.

When they came unto the island, they beheld two hundred men-at-arms encamped there, and the baresark rage fell on them. Leaping through the waves they rushed on shore and falling on the Swedes, slew them to the last man. But it chanced that Hjalmar and Oddur, being gone to the other side of the island, were not among the slain, and, hearing the shouts and the clash of weapons, they returned in haste to find the baresarks resting, with their madness spent and a great weakness come upon them. Then they stood in the shade of the wood and Hjalmar, said :

"We are but two against twelve, yet will we risk it. If I fall, bear my body back to Ingebjorg, for thou art safe in thy magic coat of quilted silk that thy grandmother bought from the witch of the Greek land. If Angantyr falls, bury thou Tyrfing with him, for the sword is a curse and a sorrow to all in the land of the north."

Oddur bent his head and the two went up alone against the twelve. Great was the fight, for Oddur engaged the eleven brethren while Hjalmar faced Angantyr with Tyrfing. One after another the baresarks fell at Oddur's feet, for they could not prevail against the magic coat, and their baresark strength had all been spent in the first fight,

and they were weaker than other men; so at last he turned to find that Hjalmar had fallen at the hands of Angantyr, but not until he had dealt the baresark a mortal wound, after twisting Tyrfin from his hand. Therefore, according to his word, Oddur caused to be built a mighty barrow, and he buried all therein, save only Angantyr, whom he laid apart in a tomb with Tyrfin between his shoulders. Thus, thought men, was the word of the dwarfs fulfilled and an end made of that Tyrfin, whereby dread and sorrow had been spread among the lands of the North.

But the body of Hjalmar did Oddur bear back unto Ingebjorg, who waited in the high-hall of Upsala. And when she saw the body of her betrothed borne in on the crossed spears of her father's warriors, she fell beside it with a loud cry, and so her spirit left her.

Now, unto Swafa, wife of Angantyr, was born a daughter, whom she called Hervar, and she was a terrible maiden from her earliest days, wild and fierce beyond all men-children. It seemed to her mother and the jarl that the baresark spirit ever held her fast, for never was she gentle as Angantyr had been when the fit was not upon him.

The jarl and Swafa, taking counsel together, thought best to tell her naught of her father, lest she should feel that it lay with her to avenge him; but she spent long weeks in the Great Forest alone, robbing travellers, living in caves upon roots and small beasts that she killed.

There found she once two witch-wives, who hailed her, saying:

"Whence comest thou, daughter of Angantyr? When goest thou forth to seek thy father's sword?"

“Spae-wives are ye not ! ” Hervar cried scornfully, “else would ye know that no baresark’s daughter am I, but the child of dead Gurth, the shepherd of the jarl.”

“Over hasty art thou, Hervar, child of Angantyr ; come hither and hear all.”

Wondering greatly, Hervar dropped her spear, shook back her matted hair, and drew near to the fire of the witch-wives. There she heard the history of her race and of Tyrfing, and, roused to fury, she rushed back to the steading of the jarl and demanded the truth.

Sadly did Swafa confirm the words of the witch-wives, and from that time Hervar went no more to the forest. Either she sat apart and brooded with sombre brows, else went she among the war-ships drawn up upon the strand for wintering, and questioned the men of the northern coasts of Samsøe and of the voyages of her father.

In time she gathered about her a set of men who, for her sake, would have passed through fire, and according to her will they built a ship with a high brazen prow like unto a flaming sword ; then she, having seen yet but nineteen winters, went before the jarl and Swafa and said :

“Mother, I go a-viking, to do deeds, to gather strength, knowledge, and plunder ; then to avenge my father and take back Tyrfing.”

But Swafa lamented sorely and prayed her to wait, but Hervar would not.

“Too long have I tarried already, now let me go and I will come again and in peace.”

Heading her men, in man’s dress, Hervar sailed to the west and ere long came tidings of her skill and fury in fighting, and her viking name, Here-

ward, became a terror to the people, even unto the western isles. Sometimes came ships bringing her booty, and the riches in the steading of the jarl increased greatly.

After two years were passed Hervar, who thought steadily of her father and of T'yrfing, told her men that they would sail to Samsöe.

"Not only will I have the sword—my due inheritance—from my father's tomb, but in the great barrow is much treasure. That shall be yours alone."

But the men murmured.

"With men war we," they said, "and not with witchcraft. Samsöe at night is safe for none but the shepherd who wards there. The spirits are abroad, strange lights are seen, and awesome noises heard. For no treasure will we land on Samsöe; also go thou not, lest the vengeance of Angantyr fall upon thee, for thy will to rob his tomb."

"The spirit of Angantyr wars not upon Angantyr's daughter," Hervar said proudly; "lose treasure if you will, I go to Samsöe."

Then her men, because they feared her, sailed with her to Samsöe, and landed on its rocky shore.

And the old shepherd met them with friendliness and gave them of his best; but the men were uneasy and ere sundown hastened back to the ship, leaving Hervar in the shepherd's hut.

"Bidest thou here with me, O Hereward?" the old man asked. "Safe wilt thou be with the door fast shut, but none is safe without."

"And why not?" quoth Hervar.

"The spirit of Angantyr, chief of the baresarks, with his brethren and those that he slew of the

Swedes, wander ever by night, and none dare go forth lest they should be torn in pieces."

But Hervar hearkened to none of these things, and, when night was come, she went across the island to the great barrow. Blue flames danced before her; great clefts opened in the ground, whence rose groans and shrieks; yet she, nothing daunted, strode on, pushing through the flames, leaping the gulfs, and laughing in mockery of the wild cries beneath her. The great barrow was a blaze of light, and near it she found the tomb of Angantyr. Cutting off a lock of hair, and taking a ring from her finger, she cast them upon the grave and began a terrible song of incantation. She told of her past deeds; of her will to be as great a baresark as her father; of the lands she would harry, and of the terror her name should bring even down to the shores of the Middle Sea.

And this was the ending of her song:

"Angantyr! mighty father! awake, awake!
Hervar, thy daughter, cries unto thee,
Hearken in thy tomb and wake!"

But there was naught but silence, and the lights went out, and all was cold and still.

"From far lands and through much toil I come
To take now from thy guardian hand the sword,
Tyrfing, thy bane and my inheritance.
Give it to me, O father, that I bless thee!"

And still the silence lasted, and the haughty maiden grew wroth.

"Hervardur, Hjorvaldur, Hrani, kinsmen mine,
Brethren of Angantyr, wake and give me my desire!"

Long waited Hervar, but in vain. Then cried she tauntingly :

“ Then are not my father and his brethren here,
No ears but thralls' are deaf unto my spells ;
Elsewhere must Angantyr's daughter seek her sire.
Fare ye well, nidderings ! ”

Even through the tomb came that evil name to rouse the baresark. With noise of thunder and blaze of lightning the ground burst asunder, and a deep voice spoke :

“ Hervar, wild daughter, sense-bereft !
Why callest thou me from my sleep ?
Why seek thy doom ?
Let the dead lie in peace.”

But she answered :

“ What peace for thee, Angantyr,
In this gruesome clash and din ?
Yield Tyrfing to thy child this night,
And then shall Odin give thee rest for aye.”

But Angantyr, fearing for his daughter and knowing the weird of the sword, answered her falsely :

“ Here by foemen was I buried,
The sword they took away ;
Tyrfing, O daughter, must thou seek
Far hence among the living.”

But Hervar cried :

“ Without truth are thy words, and like
Unto the words of Loki, deceiver.
Evil father and false art thou
Thy child to leave undowered

Angantyr answered :

“ I say unto thee, Hervar,
 Let Tyrfing rest,
 Else shall it be thy bane,
 The bane of thee and thy sons—
 Angantyr and Heidrek.
 Let Tyrfing rest ! ”

But Hervar hearkened not to his warning :

“ By my runes shall it be ordered
 That nevermore shall Angantyr rest
 If he deliver not up the Cleaver of Shields,
 The Death of Hjalmar.”

And Angantyr could prevail no more, and so answered :

“ Girl-child that should have been man,
 Take thou Hjalmar's-Bane and with it sorrow
 If thou darest.
 Under my shoulders lieth it, wrapped in flame ;
 Stretch forth thy hand ! ”

And with flames of rose and blue and green
 twisting adown the sheath, Tyrfing rose glorious
 from the tomb and fell at the maiden's feet ; and,
 as she boldly stooped to pick it up, the barrow-fires
 went out, darkness fell upon that waste place, and
 all was still.

But naught cared Hervar. Proudly she waved
 the flaming sword about her head, crying :

“ Well hast thou done, O Prince of Baresarks !
 Great shall be the fame of Hervar,
 Armed with the Devourer of Men,
 Far into the lands of the South
 And the shores of the Middle Sea.”



But naught cared Hroar.

But an answer came, low and sad :

“ Maiden, foolish and wilful, beware !
Great shall be thy sorrow ;
Great the slaughter of thy sons
Through this thy woeful wish.”

“ What need I care, O father,
For strife of sons of mine ?
To each one is it given
To live his life and die his death
Even as the Nornir will.
Fare ye well ! to my sea-men must I wend ;
Rest safe, and fare ye well, father and kinsmen all.”

And with a savage cry Hervar strode from that place. All lights were gone save only a wan, thin moon that stayed to guide her back to the hut, where the shepherd welcomed her.

At morn she went forth to the shore, to find that the vikings, frightened at the unearthly sights and sounds, had taken ship and sailed away. Many days was she forced to abide with the shepherd, but never again did they see lights and hear noises. It seemed that the release of Tyrfing had brought peace to those dwellers in the barrow.

In time there came a boat with food for the shepherd, and the men therein promising to land her at the Court of King Godmund, whose men they were, Hervar sailed with them, rewarding the good shepherd with many links cut from her great gold chain.

Now the men knew not that she was a maiden, therefore was she received by the aged king and his son, Havod, as Hereward, the Warrior. She told a true tale of her viking raids, and also of how her men had left her upon Samsöe.

"If you take me to dwell with you, O king," she said, "of much service can I be in your battles; and what I may do in fair fight, that will I in your behalf."

But the king smiled and stroked his white beard:

"We war not often, Hereward, unless in the cause of the oppressed, or if we are ourselves attacked. But bide thou here gladly, for I fear me there is war toward ere long with those savages of our eastern borders, that covet our amber and raid upon us for it."

So Hervar dwelt with Godmund and was happier than she had ever been, for she loved Havod, the prince, who, though skilled in all war exercises and a born leader of men, was gentle in speech and courteous in manner, in everything the opposite of Hervar herself. He was ever just in his dealings and cared little for the spoils of war, which he gave always to his followers. He was tall beyond all other men, and had bright flashing blue eyes and a beard golden in colour and like unto his sunny, long-flowing locks. Now Hervar, through her constant anger, had a heavy scowl on her dark brow, though her face was fair to see, and her thick locks were red-brown and tangled, for she had none of the Norse folks' pride in her hair.

Many months went by and Hervar had done good service to the king among the robbers of the Amber Coast, and each day that she passed with Havod strengthened her love for him; yet was she still fierce and unhappy, brooding drearily she knew not why, for Love that tames she could not understand.

An end was made to her stay at the Court of

King Godmund by Tyrfing, the woe-bringer, and again was the daughter of Angantyr driven forth alone.

It fell in this wise. One day the king and his son went into the courtyard to play a ball game, striking the ball with wooden bats back and forth against a wall, and Hervar leaned with folded arms against a tree to watch, Tyrfing being laid upon a bench close by.

Ere he began to play, Havod stood looking earnestly upon her, and Godmund asked :

“What seest thou, my son, in yon fierce lad?”

“I see such beauty, father, that were he but a maiden, him would I choose to wed and tame, for I love him above all other youths that I know.”

“True, son, he is of handsome build and the ring-mail sits well upon him, yet could I not desire such a firebrand daughter for mine old age. He is but a bloodthirsty wolf-cub, and with each year will he grow worse.”

“Nay, father, there is much good in him, and methinks he loves me well. As a maiden I might tame him even as I tamed yon eaglet”—and the prince broke off with a cry, for at that minute, with a savage shout, Hervar sprang across the courtyard. Against her word, one of the serving-men had borne Tyrfing from the bench where she had laid it, and had unsheathed it to show to his fellows, they rejoicing greatly, for never had Hervar let them see the glorious blade and the runes inscribed thereon. Mindful of the prophecy, Hervar caught the sword from the man's hand and slew him as he stood.

Then arose angry cries, and men came gathering round Hervar, as she calmly wiped Tyrfing and

sheathed it, then waited, proud and pale, to see what they would do; and they would have slain her there, had not the prince and the king stood forward.

"Hereward," the old king said gravely, "is this a mete reward for us, with whom thou hast lived so long, that thou shouldst do a murder?"

"Once more must I wander," answered Hervar drearily, her blazing eyes on Havod. "Yet in this am I not to blame. Have I not warned all that Tyrfing should not be touched? Once drawn, he must have blood. Thanks to you all for your friendship and welcome, and fare ye well."

And, turning, she darted through the gate and fled fast to the shore; ere they could come up with her, she had pushed off in a boat and, spreading the sail, went out to sea alone.

Heavily did Godmund, the king, and Havod, the prince, return to the Court; but at the gate there met them an old, old wife, who had been nurse to Godmund, and she said:

"Be not disheartened, child Havod; that Hereward is but a wilful maiden, Hervar, daughter of Swafa and Angantyr, and grand-daughter of the Jarl of Rögeland. Follow her overseas if thou wilt, and tame her, for she and no other shall be thy wife. This I know of my knowledge that came to me in the far-off days."

Then did Havod take heart, and gathering his men and ships, he sailed to many lands and, after seeking her for a winter and a summer, he found Hervar and married her. By then had her rage left her for love of the prince, and they lived together in much happiness. Yet, for her pride's sake, would Hervar never allow Tyrfing to be

carried back to Samsöe, whence arose many other sorrows.

Two sons were born to them, Angantyr and Heidrek, so named by the will of Angantyr, the Baresark, in his tomb. The elder was like unto his father in grace and courtesy, but Heidrek, the younger, was evil throughout; yet was he the most loved of Hervar. So froward was he that he was sent to a far-off jarl to be fostered, and came no more to his home until he numbered eighteen winters.

Then did Hervar send unto him secretly, and bid him return; but with him came naught but strife, so that ere he had been three months at his father's Court, two men had he slain, unjustly, and Havod must needs give judgment against him that he should go forth once more.

"If he go forth," said Hervar, the queen, "at least he shall go well armed, for I will give him Tyrping."

"Nay, wife," said Havod, "let Tyrping rest. So froward is Heidrek that I fear me for the evil he will work with the great sword."

But Hervar hearkened not, and calling Heidrek to her bower, she put Tyrping into his hands, and he, rushing forth in his pride, drew the sword against her word of warning, and meeting first Angantyr, his brother, straightway slew him.

Fearing to face his father, he fled oversea and sought refuge with King Harald of Sweden, where he fought well to help the king, and was held in friendship by his young son, Eirik, so that they were ever together.

But it fell one day, as they hunted in the forest, a wild boar turned at bay, and the spear of Heidrek

broke against a rock. Being in sore straits, he drew Tyrfing to slay the boar, but it vanished away in the underwood and was seen no more. Thus was Tyrfing without blood, and the young prince coming up at that minute Heidrek fell upon him and slew him.

Then were the men of the prince's following sore angered, and pursuing after Heidrek as he fled, they caught him sleeping and slew him with Tyrfing as he lay.

So was the fatal sword carried back to Havod, who took it once more to Samsöe and laid it in the tomb of Angantyr, the Baresark, that it might work no more woe. And there lies it still.

THE FINDING OF VINELAND

NOTE.—The sagas relating to the finding of Vineland are so clear in their details, that there is no doubt the land found by the Greenlanders was America.

Their first settlement, calculating by the rising and setting of the sun on the shortest day, appears to have been in Newfoundland, whence they gradually made their way south, by New Jersey, as far, probably, as Maryland, although this latter point is not established.

The Skraelings were certainly Esquimaux and not Redmen, since any people of so exceptional a colour to Norsemen would have been noted and described.

An old authority says that Columbus heard of Vineland in Iceland, where he went with some Englishmen who were commissioned to inquire into Icelandic fisheries, and that this gave him his first ideas of the western continent.

HEREIN is it told by the skalds how the Northern men found a great new land in the west; and we know that the tale is true, for no greater shame could come to a skald than to change in aught the telling of what had been handed down to him; and this we have from two skalds, and in nothing that is of moment do they differ.

This do they say—

Many years after the death of Harald Fairhair there came to Iceland, by reason of a blood-feud in Norway, a jarl, named Thorvald, with his family and house carles, and great store of treasure.

There did he hallow unto himself a pleasant holding of land, on the shores of a fjord, where came many eider ducks and wild swans and seals, and where fish were to be got for the dropping of a net; there dwelt he in peace for two winters, then he died and his holding was taken by his son, Eirik the Red.

Now, with his red hair, was Eirik hot of temper, and ere long, he having slain a man, was judged outlaw by the Althing, and must needs fare forth to other lands.

To Norway might he not go, nor to the Orkneys, since the jarl there was subject unto the King of Norway, and he was sore put to it what to do, when there came unto him a wandering seaman, who begged speech with him.

"Is the word sooth, Eirik Thorvaldson, that thou art hard put to find a safe haven?"

"It is sooth," said Eirik.

"Then hearken! Away to the west lieth a land wherein thou mayst dwell snugly. In winter is it icebound, but in summer is there fair green grass, and rye may grow, and great store is there of bramble-berries. Game and fur-beasts are there also."

"And couldst thou guide me to this land?" asked Eirik.

"Even that could I, since twice have I journeyed thither."

And after much talk, back and forth, it came about that Eirik, with Herjulf, his friend, sailed forth in two ships, and came unto the western land, which they found, even as the seaman had said, fair and green.

And Eirik named it Greenland.

"For," quoth he, "a good name goeth far, and since our own land is Iceland men will bethink them that this land is fairer, and will come hither at my word."

And he marked out a holding for himself and named it Brattli, and Herjulf dwelt near by at Herjulfness, and they sent back word to Iceland so that many followed them to the west, and built there towns for trading, whereby all prospered greatly.

Now Eirik had a son named Leif, and Herjulf a son named Bjorn, who would ever seek out new places as he sailed, and the two sons were friends even as their fathers were. Mostly did they voyage in company, but it fell out one day, that Bjorn, being alone, was driven out of his course by northerly winds and by cross currents that he knew not of, and so came through much mist and fog to a low-lying land where no people were. Three days did he sail along the coast, and the seamen came to him and said :

"Fuel lack we and water also. Since no folk are there, let us land and seek both, lest we perish."

"More like are ye to perish on shore," said Bjorn, "since in this desert land may well roam warlocks and ho'ibos¹ that would tear ye to pieces."

And by luck there came that day a south-west gale that drove them home to Herjulfness, where Bjorn told them of the new land that he had found ; and in long winter nights did he talk with Leif of this unknown country, and they settled that at the beginning of summer they would sail together to see what manner of land it might be.

Then, when the two ships were fitted out, the

¹ Wicked ghosts.

young men came unto Eirik the Red to bid him farewell, and the old man said :

“Fain would I go with you, my sons. Bid them make ready my horse that I may ride to the haven.”

And the sons would fain have said him nay.

“There will be many hardships,” said Leif; “were it not better, father, that we should first go and bring word of the manner of land we find?”

Then was Eirik wroth, and said :

“Not so old am I yet that I cannot go a-sailing. Where is my horse?”

But when he was mounted, ere he had gone fifty yards, the horse stumbled over a loose stone, and Erik came heavily to the ground. So sorely was he hurt, that he said :

“Go ye on, my sons, for I misdoubt me that no other country shall I discover than this wherein I live. Moreover, having stumbled, nought but trouble would come unto me from this voyage; so fare ye well.”

Then forth sailed Bjorn and Leif, and after a fair sailing came again to the low flat shores of the new land. There they cast anchor and went ashore, but found only barren rocky ground, which they named Stoneland. Going yet farther south they found a flat land with sandy plains and stunted trees, and this they called Markland, which means Thicketland; then with a strong breeze from the north-west, in fair sunshine with blue sky, they came after two days to a bright haven, well sheltered, where grew many new plants, of which one had honey-flavoured grain. Here, by a river, wherein swarmed salmon they set up their booths, and abode peacefully.

Then said Leif :



There they cast Anchor.

"How sayest thou, Bjorn, were it well to spend the winter season here? Then shall we know whether we may fare better than in our own cold land, and have the more to tell when we go home."

And Bjorn judged well; so they bid the men build houses, such as they had in Greenland, lest the cold should be great, and head of the men was Tyrkir, the German; a little man was he, much sun-freckled, with bright eyes, and clever in all hand-work.

One day came the men to Leif, saying: "Tyrkir is amissing, and wanting him we cannot get the roof stays fixed."

"When saw ye him last?" asked Leif.

"Two hours since he set our work, saying he would seek hard wood in the forest, and no more does he answer to our call, not even to the blowing of the great horn."

Then were Leif and Bjorn sore disturbed, for Eirik the Red set great store by Tyrkir and had been loth to let him come on this voyage, since he had been with Jarl Thorvald in Iceland, and had ever been the right hand man at Brattli. Therefore hunted they for him all day till the sun set, so that no way was made with the house-building, yet they found him not.

But, as they were setting forth next day for a further search, there came Tyrkir laughing and leaping with strange antics forth from the wood. Much did he talk, but, since all his Norse had gone from him and only German could he speak, no word could they make out of all he said, and it was not until he had slept long that he was in his right mind and able to set forth what he had done.

"Into the deep wood went I," said he, "to

search out such timber as would be best for our needs, and I happened on a fair valley where are many beasts and flowers and a spring of water, most sweet and cold. And near the spring, on a sunny hillside, were vines, such as grow in my fatherland, and upon the vines were ripe black grapes such as I have not seen since my childhood. Then I ate and ate until my senses left me, even as if I had drunk deep of mead, or of Odin's wine."

"By good luck is it that thou art not dead," quoth Bjorn; "how canst thou remember fruit of thy childhood?"

"Grapes can one never forget," said Tyrkir grinning; "wilt thou that I lead the men to that valley to eat also? Where will then thy winter houses be?"

And Bjorn laughed and said:

"Have it that they are grapes an thou wilt, but finish first the houses ere thou go forth to eat them again."

But when the houses were finished, Tyrkir guided them to the growing place of the vines, and so great was the number of them that Leif called the country Vineland.

Then abode they there for that winter and found it good; for eight hours of daylight had they at the shortest day. The cold too was less than that of Greenland, and earlier came the spring.

And when summer came again they loaded their ships with skins filled with the juice of the grapes they had picked months before, and with furs and many other things, and sailed back to their own land. Great was the noise made by their tales, so that folk gathered from all the country round, and came in boats from the northern fjords to hear again

the telling. But most of all was Thorvald, Leif's younger brother, keen to hear all that he might.

"Meseemeth, Leif," he said at last, "thou didst mighty little with thy great chances. Had I been toward I had known more of the land and people—for folks must dwell there."

"No folks were there," said Leif.

"None didst thou see," said Thorvald in scorn, "because thy head was in a bag, and Bjorn's with thee. Had I gone——"

"Go then," said Leif in wrath, "take the ship and go, since thou art so much wiser than thy elders."

"In sooth?" cried Thorvald, jumping up.

"In sooth," answered Leif, for he thought to give the boasting youngster a lesson.

But Thorvald, in fear lest Leif should change his mind, busked him hastily, and went forth to get men and ship ready, and they sailed forth and came to the place of Bjorn and Leif's houses in Vineland, and there abode through two winters, Thorvald sending forth parties of men to spy out the land; but they found no folk until the second year.

Then Thorvald headed a party and went by ship east and south; and, landing one day, he found three small boats made of skins stretched over willow work, and in each boat slept three men. Now these men were little and dark-skinned and very ill-favoured. Then Thorvald, being foolish and hot-headed, ran in and slew eight of the small men, so that only one got safe away in his boat. And this was an evil thing to do, for, in the night, came hundreds of these people back, so that the bay was black with their vessels; and so strange and shrill was the sound of their cries that Thorvald called them Skraelings and bade his men

defend themselves. And this they did so well with staves and boards from their ship that after an hour's fighting the Skraelings had shot away all their arrows, and none was wounded save only Thorvald, who was killed by an arrow entering under his arm. And this was but justice, seeing it was he who had first attacked the Skraelings.

Then did his men bury him on a ness by the great sea, and betook themselves back to their steading; and since the season was too late to return to Greenland, they busied themselves in drying grapes and packing them in casks. And when spring was come they made haste to return to their own place.

Some years went by ere any strove again to reach Vineland, but great was the talk of it at all times, and at last a man of Norway, named Thorfin Karlsaemne, who was rich and had married Gudrid, the widow of Eirik the Red's third son (whereby he claimed the right to her husband's share of Vineland) made ready and set forth.

A great ship did he take with sixty men, five women, good store of cattle, and all necessary things; and with pleasant winds they came to Leif's steading, where they abode the winter.

Good fortune had they in that, soon after their landing, there came a great whale ashore in the bay, so that food and oil had they in plenty; good pasturage was there also for the cattle, in so much that the bull they had brought waxed fierce and strong.

Thorfin and Gudrid took much thought what would be best to do to pass easily the winter-tide. Therefore were their people never in great straits, but when spring came all declared that none had ever known such an easy winter.

And at the lengthening of the days came many Skraelings to trade, bringing stores of skins, otter and sable and white rat, and Gudrid smiled upon them, for they were fearful and shy; but, as ill luck would have it, as the boldest came to the steading-gate, the great bull let out a fearful roar, so that, falling one upon another, they burst into the house of Thorfin and lay in a heap with fright.

Then the maidens, laughing, raised them up and bade them welcome with signs, and sent them forth from the steading in good mood. And as the Greenlanders sat together at their evening meal in the hall, Thorfin stood up and charged them straightly in one matter:

"These Skraelings," said he, "have no iron, therefore will our weapons and axes and knives be the things they will most desire. They know not their power, since they have but wood and stone; so see ye to it surely that never—no matter what rich store of skins they offer—do they get a hold of any iron of ours."

And all promised obedience and caution, and when the Skraelings drew nigh, always did the men gather up weapons and knives and hide them in a dark place beneath a bench. So was there much going to and fro between the two camps, till one day there came two Skraelings into the steading as the maidens were milking the kine, while Gudrid sat by, spinning. Seeing their wonder she cried:

"Give them to drink, Thora and Osten, then shall we see what they think and have much sport."

Then did Thora and Osten fill cups with new milk and give them to the men, who drank eagerly

and showed by their signs that they thought it good, ere they hastened back to their people.

Next day at dawn were many Skraelings before the steading-gate with great store of noble furs, which they would barter for the new drink. And so great was their greed, and so much did their number increase as the days went by, that in the end Gudrid said :

“If this go on, hard put to it shall we be to make our winter cheeses.”

“No matter, wife,” quoth Thorfin, “do thou the best that thou canst for this winter. In spring will we load up and sail back home, for great will be the riches of us all when this store of skins comes to be sold.”

“And the poor Skraelings will be none the richer,” said Gudrid.

“What wouldst thou, wife?” answered Thorfin, laughing, “since they will ever have their payment in their insides!”

So passed the time of midwinter, and ever friendly were they with the Skraelings, since Thorfin and Gudrid had sense and kindness in their dealings with them, and careful were the men to hide their tools.

Now it fell out a short time after the great midwinter feast that some Skraelings came in with white winter skins, and were made free of the hall, and one of them, seeing an axe lying there, hid it within his cloak and took it away.

Great was his pride as he showed it to his comrades, and, wishing to try it, he smote one of them upon the head, so that blood gushed forth and the man fell dead.

Sore amazed were they all, so that for a time

none could speak, thinking this must be witchcraft, until the headman stepped forth to handle the axe. Long time did he look upon it, to search out the charm, and finding none he took it in anger, and running on to the ness over the sea, he cast it forth as far as he was able into the deep water.

From that day there was no more friendliness between Thorfin's men and the Skraelings; and Thorfin saw that there would be much peril in abiding longer in Vineland, since, when spring came, and sea-journeying became easy, the small people might bring many others to fight against them.

Therefore made he ready the ships, and at the third week of summer all set forth, having spent three years in Vineland.

Great riches came to Thorfin by the selling of his furs and dried grapes, and he went back to Iceland, where he and Gudrid built a fair house, and he became a great lawman.

So great was now the fame of the new land that others voyaged thither from Greenland, and many settlements were made upon the coast. Thus was there much coming and going for many years, until there came upon Greenland a dreadful sickness, of which the greater part of the people died, so that no more thought was given unto the people left in Vineland, and it is not known how they lived and died. Thus did all memory of the western country fade away, and for hundreds of years was it lost. Nor was it found again until a sailor of Genoa, a city in the Middle Sea, hearing of it by chance, made search therefor. But he came unto it after much difficulty in a more southern part, nor knew he ever that it was indeed a portion of the old Norsemen's Vineland.

RAGNAR LODBROG

I

IN Viking days there dwelt in Gothland a mighty jarl who was called Hraud. No sons had he, and no child save one daughter, who was so beautiful that seldom was she called by her given name, Thora, but was known to all as Borgar-hjort, which means Hind of the Castle. By her noble birth and lovely face was she fitted to be chosen by Odin for one of his Valkyrja; but she would not, for her nature was gentle, and she feared and hated strife.

Then, since her father must be oft away on Viking raids, and since he was much disquieted at leaving her alone, did Jarl Hraud give to his daughter a magic box wherein lay much gold, and upon the heap of gold a small dragon.

And Thora, opening the box, cried out in wonder at the strange worm:

“Why should I keep this laidly thing, my father? Surely it were better away in its haunts on the far inland wastes?”

“Nay, daughter mine, this is a witch-worm, and I give it thee as a guard. Since I must leave thee for so long, it is meet that thou shouldst have a better ward than thy faithful servants. This dragon will grow to be the fear of all the lands

around us, so shalt thou dwell in peace until I come again."

So Jarl Hraud hied him forth in the long days of spring, and Thora dwelt alone in her castle. But daily grew the gold, and with it grew the dragon, until he became too great to bide longer within the castle; and Thora took counsel with her nurse and the overman of the jarl what she should do, and the overman said:

"Since the worm is here to guard thee, Lady Thora, he must not be driven forth, else will thy father be angered. Were it not well that he should bide without the castle, and so fright all that come with ill-intent?"

And the nurse said:

"Even so might it be, O nurseling; I will go speak to the worm."

Then she spake fair words to the dragon, and he saw the reason of her speech, and dragged his slow length without the castle, until his coils encompassed it on all sides. And so he lay that none could go out or in without his knowledge and sufferance, and Thora was well guarded. But as time went on the worm grew evil and would let none pass save those who brought in food; each day became he greater in strength and venom, and when the short days came, and the jarl returned to winter quarters, he was kept without his house, while Thora lay within, and might no more come forth to greet her father.

Then was Hraud in great straits, and he went unto other jarls, his friends, to take counsel what should be done. And all said one thing:

"Kill the dragon."

"Easy is it to say," quoth Hraud, "but who

shall do this deed? Too old am I to fight this monster; moreover, a witch-worm is he, and more to be feared than all worms save Fafnir, guard of Andvari's hoard."

"This do," said an aged jarl. "Cause it to be told throughout the north that whoso kills the dragon shall wed Borgar-hjort. So shall she have a worthy mate and be the fairest, best, and richest of the maidens of the land."

And all liked this counsel well, so Jarl Hraud sent abroad the word, and there was much talk and stir in many lands.

But most was there stir in the heart of Prince Ragnar, son of King Sigurd of Sweden. Oft had he heard of Thora, and his mind was filled with the thought of the fair maiden, dragon-warded. And he asked much of the messengers concerning the worm and his ways, and he caused to be made five cloaks of coarse wool and five pairs of breeches, and these he had boiled in pitch so that they were hard and like unto garments of thick leather, but some men say that they were but wild goat-skin. Be that as it may, from these breeches got he his name of Lodbrog, which means leathern breeches.

So Ragnar went up against the dragon, and after a mighty fight, wherein the great beast sought to poison him by biting through his clothes but was unable by reason of their thickness, he struck his spear so forcefully through the back of the dragon that he was unable to draw it forth, and the shaft broke off and remained in his hand. And the dragon cried aloud in its death-pain:

"Ah, that I, the terror of the nations, the warder of Borgar-hjort, should be done to death

by the guile of a stripling. Tell me, youth, how many winters hast thou?"

"But fifteen," answered Ragnar straightly.

"Thora! Thora!" cried the worm, "this fifteen years' boy hath ventured much for thee. Take him, love him well, for he will cherish thee greatly."

So died the dragon, and this is the true story, though some say that the dragon was but a chief named Orm, set over Thora's castle by Hraud, and who, on his return, would by no means give her up. But this is false, since no word is there at this time of a Jarl Orm in Gothland.

Then went Prince Ragnar unto the jarl, where he sat awaiting the issue of the fight.

"The worm is dead, O jarl," said Ragnar, "and in proof that I have slain him here is my spear shaft. The point is set in the worm's back where ye may find it. Now claim I thy Borgarhjort for my bride, to love her ever for her goodness and her grace and her beauty."

"And blithely shalt thou have her," quoth the Jarl, and led the youth into the castle, where Thora straightway loved him and plighted him her troth.

So they loved and lived in happiness many years, and two sons were theirs, Ragnvald and Agnar, who went a-viking with their father, until it fell out that gentle Thora died and Ragnar thereafter could no longer suffer his home. Putting his realm into the hands of first one, then the other of his sons and of his wise counsellors, he, with the other son—each in turn—sailed a-raiding. It is told of him that he sailed east, even up the

Vistula, and southward by the great rivers of Gardar, unto Miklagard,¹ to visit the Norse Varanger guard of the ruler there; on the Danube slew he eight chiefs and gathered much spoil; and it is written that he returned by the Middle Sea. In all lands was he known and feared, yet could he not always conquer, for, as time went on, first Ragnvald and then Agnar fell in battle, and Ragnar was indeed alone.

Then went he no more to Sweden, but sailed, ever plundering. Throughout Iceland, the Isles of the West, and the Fleming's land was he known and dreaded in the summer-time, and the winters passed he in the warm havens of the Middle Sea. But his men grew hungry to see their homes, and would fain return northward.

"Seven years have we followed thee unmurmuring, O Ragnar," they said, "now is it our turn that we should sight the shores of Sweden."

And Ragnar knew that they were right, and he said:

"Black were my locks when I came forth with ye all, grey are they now with my unending sorrow. But it is not mete that all should suffer for one, therefore, hoist thee the great sail and let us return to our own land. It may be that so I may find comfort."

Then was great joy through all the long-ships, and their beaks were speedily turned northwards so that, with fair winds, they swiftly sped towards their home. But ere they came into Sweden much befell, whereof the tale must be told.

¹ Byzantium.

II

NOW it is told that Heimar of Hlymdal, brother to Brynhild, the Valkyr, had, at fostering, a beautiful woman-child, named Aslaug. None knew her race, but most thought her to be the child of Sigurd and Brynhild. Be that as it may, at the death of Sigurd, fearing the vengeance of Gudrun for her slain son, Sigmund (whom Brynhild had killed and laid upon the bale of Sigurd), Heimar caused to be made a great harp, with a golden stem, wherein he hid the maid, with rich treasure of gold and jewels, and onions for her to eat, since these give strength and sustain life long. And he dight upon him the clothes of a wandering skald, and, the golden harp upon his back, fared forth to seek safety for Aslaug. Through many lands went he, letting the child out from her hiding-place to run when they were hidden from the eyes of men, and playing on the harp to comfort her when she sorrowed for her home.

Now, it befell that late at eventide on a dreary day of rain, Heimar came to a lonely place in Norway, that was called Spangarhede, but now is it called Krakebeck, or Guldvig, because of the king's daughter, who lay hidden in the golden harp.

There dwelt an old man Aki, with his wife Grima, and Heimar, being wet and weary, smote hard upon their door. Now Aki was absent, and Grima was long in opening, for she would first look well through a crack in her wall to know who this stranger might be.

And seeing this man of kingly height and noble

face, with the golden harp upon his back, she unlatched the door, and asked :

"What wouldst thou in our poor house at night?"

"Shelter would I have from the rain, good mother," answered Heimar, "mayhap, fire to dry my clothes, and food, for I am wet and weary."

"Shelter canst thou have," said Grima, "but neither fire nor food. Few peats have I, and what I have must wait for my man, who journeys far to-day."

"Nay, but if I pay thee well canst thou not give me aught?" asked the king.

"Take then," said Grima, "there are peats; kindle fire thyself."

And as Heimar busied himself with the fire, the wicked hag sat glowering, and she noticed that as he stretched forth his arms to the blaze, there glinted under the fringe of his harper's frock, the shine of a great gold arm-ring, and she thought :

"None know that this stranger is here. Good were it if we could take his gold, for weary am I of being poor."

Then came a knocking at the door, and old Aki entered, bearing peats upon his back. Him did Heimar greet in friendliness, and together they ate of the rye-bread that Grima set before them, and talked as they ate :

"Always poor have I been," said Aki, "and oft an hungered. Fain would I give over work and take mine ease."

"That perchance may come to thee soon, friend," said Heimar cheerily, as he laid him on the settle to sleep, and he thought to himself :

"Perchance when the old pair are quiet in the

byre, may I draw forth Aslaug to sleep here by me."

But Aki and Grima slept not, and so long did they keep moving that Heimar fell into that sleep that was his last.

For Aki, set on by the wicked Grima, stole in and killed him as he lay. So died the noble Heimar for the sake of his sister's child.

Then through the mirk dark night they bore the body forth, and buried it deep in the sand-dunes, and set stones atop, and, as the late dawn came, crept back to the lonely hut.

There Grima laid hold upon the harp, and the strings wailed mournfully, so that she pushed it from her in haste. In falling the pillar burst open, and there lay Aslaug, the maiden, smiling with the wondrous steel-blue eyes of Sigurd, the Volsung. In terror the two fell upon the ground, and Grima, shuddering, cried :

"Kill her! kill her! O Aki! lest through her words our doom come upon us."

"No more killing will I do," said Aki gloomily. "Our doom is here and our own guilt will never die, since I slew a man by stealth and not in fair fight."

But Aslaug spoke never a word. She busied herself in gathering up the gold and jewels that were scattered over the ground, and in folding the golden stuffs and laying them again within the harp pillar.

"Tell me thy name," said Grima at last.

But Aslaug shook her golden head and smiled once more ; and still she said no word, so that the two believed her dumb.

Now it had fallen out in this wise :

When Heimar went forth from Hlymdal he feared greatly lest the child should babble and tell her name and parentage, therefore had he straightly bidden her to speak to none but himself, and that only when they were alone.

Now Heimar being gone, Aslaug spoke no more to any living being.

Then, since Aki would by no means kill the child, Grima took her and darkened her white skin with juices of the bracken, and hid her golden hair under a rude cap of wadmal, so that none might know in her the princess in silken garments, and sent her forth to tend swine in the forest and goats upon the sea-shore. These they had bought with a part of Heimar's treasure; the rest they hid in safe places, and the golden harp they destroyed. No longer Aslaug was she called, but Krake.

Dreary was her life and strange were the thoughts that came to her as she sat alone among the pine trees, whispering all the words she knew lest she should forget the speech of men. So many and far-reaching were these thoughts that she grew wiser than others of her kind, seeing that she—like Sigurd, her father—knew even the speech of birds.

At whiles, when storms raged on the sea, she would sit upon the sand-dunes and sing. And so strong and beautiful was her voice that the sailors far out from shore said:

“Hearken, how the Valkyrja ride the storm.”

One strange thing did she, nor ever knew the reason for the doing, since the birds told her not.

Upon the shore, among the dunes, was a lonely barrow with a few stones thereon, and Aslaug said to herself:

“Perchance a dead man lies here; a viking who

should have been sent to sea in his burning ship. Be that as it may, a mighty barrow shall he have. Some man of power and might must it be, since by night the flame flickers ever thereon."

And daily went she to the shore, bearing ten stones that she set upon the barrow.

And the old people, watching her, trembled and said one to the other :

"She knows that the harper lies therein."

But Aslaug never knew ; and, as years went by, the barrow grew until it overtopped the sand-dunes. So went the time until fifteen winters had passed over her.

III

Ragnar and Aslaug

NOW it fell one day that Ragnar, in his sailing, came nigh to Spangarhede, and, seeing there a sandy fjord with pine trees and a spring of fresh water, he sent men ashore to get the water and to bake bread. Then made they an oven of heated stones, and, having drawn forth the fire and set the dough in the oven to bake, they went into the forest. And as they went there came to them the sound of singing ; so, treading warily, they followed the sound and reached at last a sunlit pool, where sat Aslaug. As she sang she combed her long hair, shaken loose from the wadmal cap ; and, washed clean from stains, her skin shone white as silver in the sun.

Then came they forward and greeted her. And then, the first time since Heimar went, Aslaug spoke with men.

"Who are ye?" she asked, in no wise afear'd.
 "Whence come ye, and of what people?"

"We are the men of Ragnar of Sweden, and we go a-viking," they answered.

Then bade she them sit near to her while she questioned them of the far lands they had seen; merry was she withal, so that mighty was the sound of laughter in the forest; and it was not until towards eventide that they bethought them of their bread.

So they bade farewell to Aslaug and betook them back to their oven, and behold! the bread was burnt black.

Then looked they upon one another, and one said:

"This comes of woman's wiles. Ever will there be trouble where woman is."

And another laughed and said:

"Herein is no blame to the woman, but to the foolish men who had no sense to remember duty when a woman spoke. Still, naught can we do now but bear back burnt bread to the ship."

So they shouldered the bread and bore it seawards to where Ragnar sat on the deck looking at the sunset.

"Where is the bread?" quoth the forecastle man, "and why bear ye stones upon your shoulders?"

And shamefast they cast down the loaves and said:

"These be bread."

Then did the forecastle man rate them sorely so that Ragnar came up to see what was to do.

"No man could think on bread with that maiden by," the men repeated; and so much did they tell



As she sang she combed her long hair,



of her wondrous fairness and wit, that Ragnar said :

“At morn shall ye go and fetch me this maid ; and that I may know whether she hath such wit as ye say, bid her come unto me not alone nor yet in company ; not clad nor yet unclothed ; not fasting yet having eaten naught.”

And the men went and finding Aslaug waiting by the pool, gave the message of the king.

But Aslaug laughed and shook her head :

“How know I thy king’s mind ?” she asked, “mayhap he might take me and carry me overseas, an I would not. Go ye back and say that I trust no man, and go no whither unless he pledge me by the eye of Odin that I come back scatheless as I go.”

Then took they this word unto Ragnar, and first he was wroth that a herd-maiden should doubt him ; but in the end, since she would not come without, he sent his gold arm-ring as a pledge for his word.

Then, at red dawn, came a strange sight down the fjord to the long-ship.

Krake, since by this name did the men know her, had bathed in the pool until her skin was white as the winter moonlight ; no clothes had she, but a red-brown fishing net was wrapped many times around her and over it, to her knees, showered her golden hair. Naught had she eaten but she had set her white teeth in an onion, so fasted not. No person came with her, save her dog, so she was not alone.

And when Ragnar beheld her he said :

“ Surely no woman had ever wit like unto this

maiden's, even as none had ever beauty like unto hers."

And the more he talked with her, the more did he marvel, so that ere evening came he bade her sail away with him and be his wife. But she would not.

"Herd-maidens wed not with kings," she said.

"But here is Thora's robe," he answered; then he sang:

"Take thou O sweet, this silver-wrought kirtle,
Borgar-hjort owned it, and she would rejoice,
Fain would she, living, have called thee sister,
Fain would she, dying, have known me in peace.
Faithful was she till the Nornir divided us
Faithful wilt thou be until my life's end."

And Aslaug sang back:

"Ne'er may I take the silver-wrought kirtle,
Owned long years since by Thora thy queen;
Never can eagles mate with the ravens,
Krake my name is, and coal-black I go,
Ever in wadmal, herding the cattle,
Hard must I ever live, far from all wealth."

Since he might not prevail on her at that time to go with him, the king bound her by an oath that, when he had been ten months a-viking, if his mind should still be set upon her, he might return and she would wed him. Loth was the king to let her go, but, being bound by his word, he led her back to the forest and sailed away from Norway.

"In truth," quoth he, "never have I had so bright a day since Thora died."

IV

Ragnar's Sons

NOW, when the ten months were overpast, came Ragnar, full of thoughts of Krake, to hold her to her word.

And as the long-ship's sails, striped blue and white, fell upon the deck, and the ship brought-to in the fiord, there on the bank stood Aslaug, fair and white and golden, in the sunlight to welcome them. So she sailed away to Ragnar's land, and there he wedded her, and they lived happily, so that he went no more a-viking.

Four sons had they and two daughters. Of the sons, Ivar, the first born, was strangely made, in that there was no bone in his legs, but only gristle; so that he must ever be borne to war upon a litter of spears. Yet was he wise above all other folks, save only his mother. Next came Bjorn, and he was a baresark; then Hvirtserk, and young Ragnvald, so called after Ragnar's other son, who had been killed long years before.

Wiser each day grew Aslaug in runes and magic, and it was in her mind that some day might Ragnar, though now aged, wish again to go a-viking, since this had ever been his life's work. Therefore called she her daughters and said:

"Let us make for Ragnar a shirt, wherein I will weave magic and runes so that, old though he be, no steel nor venom shall ever hurt him."

And she took silk from the South lands, the fibres of herbs that she alone knew, and some of her hair and that of her daughters, and she taught them magic songs, so, as they wove, they sang,

and the spells were worked back and forth through the shirt until they filled it throughout. Then did Aslaug lay it by until it should be needed.

Then did the daughters make a banner also, and sang runes over it; and upon it was worked a raven with great wings that should flap when it was carried to battle.

Now there came one day the King of Upsala to visit Ragnar, and in his mind was a certain plan. This was that Ragnar should put away Aslaug, and take to wife Osten, the king's child; for greatly did he desire a bond between himself and Ragnar, who was first and richest of the Northern kings. And it chanced that they sat together in the court-yard, beneath Aslaug's window, so that she heard all that passed, and how that the king taunted her as a peasant's daughter and no fit mate for the great Ragnar.

But Ragnar put him off with fair words, since he might not flout a guest, and said him neither yea nor nay.

Then was the heart of Aslaug bitter within her, and there came upon her the spirit of Brynhild, her mother, and she spoke no more to the King of Upsala, nor went into the high-hall until he had gone home.

And Ragnar asked:

"Fair wife, what is amiss?"

"Canst thou call her 'fair wife,' who is no jarl's daughter, but a low-born peasant from the forest?"

Then the king knew that she had heard somewhat and told her all; and also how he had put the king's word aside unanswered.

And Aslaug, being blithe that he had hidden nothing from her, told him her story.

"No Krake am I," said she, "but the child of

Sigurd Fafnir's Bane, and Brynhild. The last of the Volsung race am I also, since Swanhild is dead."

And she told all the story of Heimar, as it is here set forth, save that she knew not, even by her runes, how Heimar died, and she ended :

"For myself hast thou loved me, and for thy love ought I to have told thee this before. But I treasured the thought that thy love was given to Krake, and not to the last daughter of the Volsungs. Forgive ! "

And Ragnar kissed her joyfully ; and word of Aslaug's birth was spread abroad in the land, so that no more did the King of Upsala put forth his daughter, since none could vie with the Volsung race.

Now, during these years had the sons of Ragnar gone a-viking, and many were the deeds they did, and worthy of their sire.

It had befallen, during the life-time of Thora, that Ragnar had made prisoner the King of Northumbria, and forced him to pay scatt¹ yearly unto him. But when this king died, Ella, his son, being young and foolhardy, refused the scatt to Ragnar's jarl ; and bade him tell the King of Sweden to come and gather it at point of sword.

"Bring forth thy magic coat, good wife," cried Ragnar ; "once more must I go fight."

And clad in the silken shirt, with the raven-banner floating overhead, did Ragnar Lodbrog sail westward to return no more.

For there were witch-wives in Northumbria, and they, hearing of his cunning, raised a great storm, so that the long-ships were broken in pieces on the rocks, and the king and his men came to shore with naught but their arms.

¹ Tribute.

Then came up Ella with his soldiers against them, and bade them stand and fight ; so did they, until all were killed, save the old king who stood alone unhurt amid the ring of dead.

Then said Ella :

“ Who art thou that thou comest with warships against me ? ”

But Ragnar answered not.

“ Nameless canst thou not be,” said Ella. “ Tell me thy name lest ill befall thee.”

Still Ragnar spoke not.

“ The worse shall it be for thee if thou wilt not speak,” said Ella ; but uneasy was he for he knew that if this were Ragnar, great would be the vengeance of Ragnar’s sons, should he be killed.

Yet, since days passed and still Ragnar made no sign, Ella gave word that he should be cast into the orme-gaard, which was a pit full of venomous snakes. “ The serpents,” said he, “ will make him speak. Then if he be Ragnar draw him quickly forth.”

But the snakes shrank back from the king’s magic shirt, and would in no wise touch him, and, seeing this, the watchers took from him his shirt so that he was bitten on all sides.

Then did Ragnar sing that Death Song, that has made his name famous throughout the ages. He told of his battles—fifty-one ; of his dead sons ; of the kings he had conquered ; and he ended :

“ We fought with swords !
 O, that Aslaug’s sons
 Knew of their parent’s death !
 Valiant is the heart they got
 From their mother, daughter of Sigurd.

We fought with swords!
Now fades the world away.
Now comes the call of the gods;
To one who welcomes it
Death is a glorious time.

We fought with swords!
With joy I make an end.
Fast ride the Valkyrja
Bearing me to Odin,
To the halls of Valhalla.

With joy I make an end,
Soon shall I drink with gods.
Past are the hours of my life
Laughing do I die."

So died Ragnar Lodbrog, greatest of vikings, first even before Rolf the Ganger; and mighty was the vengeance for his death.

Now, when Ella heard of the Death Song he feared greatly, and he sent messengers to the sons of Ragnar, charging them straightly that they should mark well what each son said and did when the news was told, and bring the word to him with all speed.

V

The Vengeance of Ivar

NOW it chanced that the four brethren were together in the castle hall when there came a warder, running, to say that the messengers of Ella were without.

Then Bjorn, who stood fixing a spearhead to its handle, laughed:

"It is the scatt," cried he, "Ella hath heard of the setting forth of our father and is afeared."

"Not that, but something worse," said Ivar gravely, from his couch.

Hvirtsark and Sigurd, his foster-brother, were playing draughts; only Ragnvald was not there.

And when the messengers were brought in, Ivar spoke them fair, and asked their news; and the men told it bravely and without fear, and by no word did the brethren stay them. But when they told of the Death Song and the vengeance that the sons should take, Ivar became by turns pale and red, and his lips were blue; Bjorn gripped so hard his spear-shaft that his finger-marks were in the wood as long as it lasted; Hvirtsark pressed the draught-piece he held so tightly that blood spirted from his finger-ends; and Sigurd, who had taken up a knife to carve a stick, cut his finger to the bone and knew it not. And for a long space did no one speak when the tale was told.

Then, with an evil laugh, said Hvirtsark:

"Brethren, best were it to kill these men that Ella may know our will."

"Nay," said Ivar, "these men have borne themselves well in a perilous errand, and scatheless shall they return, the more so that I bid them carry this word:

"King of Northumbria, the death words of Ragnar sink deep into the heart of Ragnar's sons, but they bide their time."

So went the men forth with all honour, and carried the message unto Ella. And the king was troubled when he heard it, and said:

"From all Ragnar's sons fear I naught, save only from the still Ivar."

And he made haste to prepare his fighting men, and banded himself with the Kings of England,

that he might withstand the onslaught of Lodbrog's sons.

The brethren also made ready ships to go over against Ella, although against the will of Ivar.

"Let be for awhile," said he, "until we know the strength of Ella," and he sent forth messengers to bring word of the doings in Northumbria.

But Aslaug, their mother, brooding fiercely over the death of Ragnar, gave them no peace. Ever sang she the Death Song in their ears as she span, and never passed a day that she did not taunt them, in that their father's death was unavenged.

Then saw Ivar that his brethren were set to go forth, therefore did he give but one warning more:

"Ye know naught of the power of the king," he said, "stay your hand until we gather more news of him, for, I hear, that with him are the Kings of Mercia and Wessex, and, if this be so, we shall but suffer defeat for naught. Prepare well, ere ye go."

"Doth this mean that thou goest not with us?" asked Bjorn hotly.

"Nay, brother, Ragnar's sons have ever one cause. My men and treasure are yours, and with you I will sail, but I take no part in the fight since I know that ye will fail."

"That is fair speech, brother," said Bjorn, "with thee there will all go well."

"All will go ill, I tell thee, Bjorn; yet, if I be there, I may yet remedy it somewhat."

So they set forth in many ships, but as they landed, there came up Ella with a mighty host, and routed them, so that they must go back to their ships, yet not so sorely that they need feel aught but shame at being beaten by the English.

Now Ivar went not back but stayed on land, and sent two jarls unto Ella with this word :

“Were-gild must we have for our father’s death, and since I cannot go a-viking with my brethren, I will that thou give me land on this thy shore, that I may dwell in peace.”

“That were a fool’s trick,” quoth Ella, “to set Ragnar’s son in the midst of my kingdom.”

“Nay,” said Ivar, “carry my word to Ella, that never will I bear arms against him, and with the word of Ivar Ragnarsson must he be content.”

“And what will Ivar Ragnarsson and his brethren take for were-gild?” asked Ella; “since with Ivar’s word, in sooth, I am content.”

“Even as much land as he can enclose within an oxhide,” the jarls replied.

Then Ella laughed, well-pleased, for he thought :

“This Ivar, of whom we hear great things, is a fool, and can in nowise harm me.”

And he granted the were-gild.

But when Bjorn and his brethren heard of Ivar’s doings they were sore angered, and went to Ivar to reproach him. But Ivar would say naught in his own defence.

“Leave me to my own way,” he said, “is not our father as much to me as to you? Take from my store at home, each your share of the were-gild and send to me the rest, and”—here he looked narrowly upon each brother in turn—“*when ye get the crossed twig, banded with red, come ye, and your following, with all speed.*”

Then the brethren bade him farewell, knowing some crafty plan must be in Ivar’s mind; and sailed away until he should have need of them.

But Ivar bid his men take an oxhide, the

largest they could find, and steep it well until it grew lithe ; then did he set them to cut it into fine strips, and sew these strips end to end, so that their length was very great. When this was done he sent unto Ella, saying :

“Ivar Ragnarsson desires that thou shouldst be present at the measuring of his land.”

So the king came, and greatly was he pleased with the well-favoured face and courteous speech of Ivar, for he had a silvern tongue. And they went forth until they came to a great plain with a fair hill set in the midst ; and there Ivar bade them set down his litter.

“This hill would I fain have, O king !”

“Have it and welcome,” laughed the king ; “as much as thy oxhide will enclose.”

Then the thralls brought forth the hide, and the king grew grave when he knew how Ivar had bested him. Yet he made no sign when the whole fair hill, and much land therewith, was compassed round about, for he said to himself :

“Even this is poor pay for the death of such a man as Ragnar Lodbrog.”

So Ivar built him a stronghold on the hilltop, which was afterwards called Lincoln, and by reason of his wisdom and justice, there came many to dwell under its shelter, even his countrymen from the Norselands ; and his fame as a man of peace went abroad throughout all England. Yet knew no man that Ivar, by his craft, had set the other kings, who were banded with Ella, at odds with him, so that in time the King of Northumbria could depend on none to take his side, save only his own people.

Then came a day when Ivar called the trustiest of his men to him and said :

"Take this, hand it to my brother, Bjorn, and say unto him, 'Ivar greets thee and his brethren.'"

"Naught but this?" said the man, in wonder, for Ivar had given him but a small stick marked with red.

"Naught but that," he answered, and the man went forth.

Then was great stir in the seaboard of Sweden and Norway, for the brethren had spent these years in making ready, since they trusted Ivar and they never forgot. And word of it came to Ella and troubled him greatly, so that he sent to Ivar, saying:

"An oath didst thou swear unto me, never to bear arms against me. What is this that I hear of thy brethren and their fighting men? If they come up against me, since thou hast thy part in my kingdom, thou must fight on my side."

"Against thee have I sworn not to fight, but against the children of Ragnar and Aslaug, my brethren, neither will I lift an hand."

Then the sons of Ragnar sailed ahead of their ships and came in secret to Ivar. And he told them of the trouble he had made between the kings; of the number of Ella's men; and of where they could best meet him for the furthering of their own ends.

So when their men were come ashore there was a sore fight that lasted throughout the day, and always, when the need was greatest, was Ivar found, borne in his litter, among the Norsemen; yet he held no weapon in his hand, naught but a small white staff.

And at eventide the men of Northumbria were

all dead, or fled away, and only Ella remained, a prisoner in the hands of Ragnar's sons.

Then, remembering their father's cruel end, they took him forth next day and slew him, nor did Ivar say a word to stay their hands.

And this should not have been, and is a shame unto Ivar's name, since he had asked and had been granted were-gild for his father's life.

Yet, in that his deeds were good, and his rule merciful and just, soon did folks forget the death of Ella, and Ivar lived to a great old age within his lands; nor did he ever return to his own country. But his brethren went a-viking, gathering thereby wealth, that Aslaug and their wives warded for them in Sweden, until all perished; but still were left their children to keep alive the name of Ragnar Lodbrog through all days to come.

FRITHJOF OF FRAMNESS

I

Beli, Thorstein, and Hilding

BEFORE the time of Harold Fairhair there dwelt in Norway many kings. One of the best and most powerful was Beli, king of Søgne-land. His wife was dead, but he had three children—Helgi, Halfdan, and the fair and wise Ingebjorg.

On the west of the Søgne fjord, in King Beli's land, lay the great temple of Baldur the Beautiful—the holiest of the gods. There was a large tract of meadow-land around, enclosed with palings, and called Baldur's meads, wherein no buying and selling, no love-making, and no fighting nor strife might be done, for it was the place of peace and rest, as Baldur would wish.

King Beli had many great jarls in his train, of whom the greatest were Thorstein of Framness, whose land lay towards the cliffs of the sea, and Hilding, whose land was toward the south and among the mountains and woods. Thorstein and Hilding were great friends.

Now in those days, and for some hundreds of years after, it was the custom that the nobles should send their children to other nobles to be taught all

manner of craft—hunting, seamanship, and the use of all weapons. So Hilding said to his wife :

“Thorstein of Framness is oft away gathering scatt¹ from the outlying islands for King Beli ; it were well that he should give me Frithjof to foster and bring up with our Bjorn and Asmund the while ; and, since it were well for thee to have a maiden to train in the housewifely ways thou knowest so well, I will even ask Beli for his Ingebjorg also. The girl will ne’er learn to weave and spin and broider in that house of men-folk, and she should be taken soon from those evil young wolf-cubs, her brothers.”

Hilding’s wife agreed, and he set out to talk with his friends. And the end of their talk was that Frithjof, the bravest, strongest, and best-beloved of the youths of the fjord-land, and fair Ingebjorg, the jewel of the kingdom, were brought to Hilding’s home to foster with Bjorn and Asmund, who thought that in the whole wide world was not such a hero as Frithjof, since Sigurd, the Volsung, was foully slain.

Many years did the four children abide together and merry were those years, but at last the time came when Ingebjorg must return to her father to take her place as Princess of Søgne ; and Frithjof must help his father guard the realm of the king. With him went Bjorn and Asmund, who would in no wise leave their foster-brother.

Now King Beli was very old, and it needed all the watchfulness of Thorstein, whom the king had made ruler over one-third of the kingdom, to prevent the thievish kings around from stealing the outlying lands and islands. Therefore, this being

¹ Tribute.

more than he could manage, with the gathering of the tribute also, was he rejoiced to see these tall young men, with their well-armed servants, come striding into his hall; and well was he pleased to see that his Frithjof overtopped them all by a head.

But Helgi and Halfdan were angered when they saw the beauty of Thorstein's son, for they were lazy and sullen, loving only to sit and eat and sleep in the high-hall, and hating to go on a hunt or a viking raid.

The more did they hate him because King Beli and Ingebjorg praised him always, and their sister, seeing this, teased them yet more and mocked their wives also for having married these nidders.

Now, most prized of the possessions of Jarl Thorstein was his wonderful ship, named Ellide. She was built of oak, brought with much labour over the sea from the white island in the west,¹ where the best oak trees grew. She was clamped with iron, her sails were blue, and her prow was a great white swan with wings outspread. She was a magic ship, having the gift of understanding the speech of men, and Frithjof alone pulled the two bow oars, Bjorn pulled one, and to every other oar were two men.

II

Frithjof, Ingebjorg, and Ring

ERE many years were passed the old king was smitten unto death. He called his sons and said to them: "Guard well thy sister, for there is

¹ Britain.

no woman equal to her in Norway for beauty and riches. Hold firmly and truly to Thorstein and Frithjof, for they are thy staunchest warders. Raise a mound for me at the edge of the sea that I may look out westward and see what befalls. So fare ye well."

So there came a swift runner to Thorstein to tell him of the king's death. Then they all took the king and set him, sword in hand, with his face to the west, on his stone chair, with treasures of gold and silver and amber around him; then they built over him an arched roof of rocks and covered all with a great mound of earth.

When the old jarl had done this he was soul-weary at the death of his friend, and he said to Frithjof:

"Make my mound beside King Beli, that we may watch together and cry out unto each other the tidings of the realm. But be thou a faithful steward in all things to the king's sons. And guard well Ellide and my arm-ring."

Now this arm-ring was a costly thing, so that there was none other like unto it throughout Norway. Of gold was it, and inscribed with runes so old that none could read them, and chiefest treasure was it held of the jarl's house.

So Thorstein died, and his mound was made by King Beli's, even as he had said.

And now that Frithjof's fame and wealth were so greatly increased, did Helgi and Halfdan hate him yet more, although he spake always with honour unto them.

When the days of mourning were over, Frithjof bid the kings and their sister to a great feast, and the brothers noted that the jarl spoke much with

beautiful Ingebjorg; nor was this strange, for he had loved her ever since they dwelt together in Hilding's hall.

"Now," said Helgi to Halfdan, with an evil grin, "can we pay this upstart his due and flout him! or shall we give him Ingebjorg in return for his lands and his great gold ring, and force him away overseas to find a home, and so be well rid of him and her, the proud jade?"

"Nay," growled Halfdan, "his strength and cunning are such that he would be more like to force us overseas."

Then these wicked brethren returned home.

When Frithjof and Bjorn had watched the company of boats row across the fiord, Bjorn saw that the jarl was sad. He said naught for many days, but, as Frithjof grew ever grimmer, he spoke at last and asked what was to do, and Frithjof said: "I love Ingebjorg, the princess."

"Then let us go and ask for her," said Bjorn.

They searched for the kings and found them sitting on their father's mound, with their chins on their knees, looking like evil fat spiders waiting for prey.

The two tall young men sprang up the barrow and greeted them brightly, but they took no heed, so Frithjof with much patience told them his love and prayed that they would give him Ingebjorg. Helgi looked askance at him out of his little pig's eyes and said:

"We cannot give our sister to a nidding."

Now this was the greatest insult they could put on a brave man, but, angered as he was, Frithjof said calmly:

"Since ye call me of no account my errand is

soon done ; but never ye ask help of me, need ye it ever so, for I give it not."

The kings laughed in scorn and the foster-brothers turned them homeward to Framness.

Now, over the mountains in Sweden, dwelt a mighty, though aged, king, named Ring.

When he heard of the quarrel in Sögne-land he said to his war-men :

"Helgi and Halfdan have broken with Frithjof the Brave, so now I will send and say they shall pay me scatt, else will I war with them, for they have neither wit nor wisdom, and I need a good harbour on the open sea."

The kings would not pay the tribute and sent abroad the war-token to gather their men ; when they came they were so few that they dared not face King Ring and they knew not where to turn.

Then said Halfdan :

"Let us send Hilding to Frithjof, for, maybe, being his foster-father, he can make peace."

So Hilding, went and looking in at the open door of Framness, found Frithjof and Bjorn playing chess.

They greeted him, and he gave the message of the kings. The young men looked at each other, but said nothing, and went on playing.

Presently Frithjof said :

"A bare place on thy board, foster-brother, and thou canst not mend it. Now I will try whether thy red piece be safe."

Then said Hilding :

"Helgi says, look for evil from him if thou go not."

Bjorn said :

"A double game, brother, and two ways to play it."

Then answered Frithjof:

"Fall first on knave."

Since neither would answer him, Hilding returned to the kings, and he interpreted in this wise what he had heard.

"The red piece is Ingebjorg, so guard her well if ye are minded to stay this marriage. The game is a double one, for Frithjof and Bjorn will venture somewhat while ye fall on the knave, which is Ring."

"Well!" said the brethren, "we must e'en go with what men we have."

But before they set out they put Ingebjorg and her eight maidens in Baldur's meadow, thinking that even the bold Frithjof would dare no love-making in that holy place.

Frithjof watched them set forth with their meagre train of war-men and he laughed for joy. Then he went and put on his best clothes and slipped the gold ring, all engraved with ancient runes, on his upper arm, and called his foster-brother and men to help him launch Ellide.

"Whither away?" asked Bjorn.

"To Baldur's meads," laughed Frithjof, and the brothers laughed also.

They rowed over fjord to the bright green fields of Baldur and went up to the glorious house of carved wood. It was hung inside with silken stuffs and tapestry, that the sea rovers had brought back from many raids along the shores of the Middle Sea; and there sat fair Ingebjorg in the midst of her maidens, thus were there nine men and nine maids. She came forward joyously when



The Young Men looked at each other, but said nothing.

she saw them : "Frithjof ! Frithjof ! " she said, shaking her head so that the long waves of her hair danced : "Thou art over-bold."

"With love, yes," said Frithjof, "for love is more powerful with me than thy brethren's anger."

"Be thou very welcome, thou and thy followers," said the princess. So they all sat together and were merry.

Presently Ingebjorg saw Frithjof's great gold ring and liked it well, and questioned him of its story.

"I will plight troth with thee on it," quoth Frithjof, "if thou wilt bind thyself to send it back when thou art tired of it and me."

The princess was fain to do this and gave him instead her own ring, and so they plighted troth. Every day Frithjof rowed over fjord and spent with her until five weeks were over-past.

Now King Ring was greatly angered in that the brother-kings had said "it were shame of an old man to go to war, when he scarce could mount his horse," for, though Ring was aged, hale and hearty was he still.

But when the fight should have been, came folks between to make peace, and since the brothers feared Ring greatly, they made a bond with him, after much talk, that they should be subject unto him, and should give him Ingebjorg to wife, with the third part of their lands as dowry ; but they sent no word of this back home, for they were ashamed.

When Frithjof thought that the time was near for them to return, he said to Ingebjorg :

"Now is our merry time over-past, and good

Baldur seemeth not angered with us, since naught evil have we done. Kindly have ye welcomed us."

Then answered the Princess with a smile:

"Can one do aught but welcome one's friends wheresoever one may be? Sure Baldur would be wroth at want of courtesy, though bold have ye been to come into his steading."

"One thing I beg," said Frithjof, "when tidings come of the kings' return spread ye your sheets upon the roof of the hall of the goddesses, since that is the highest spot of Baldur's temple, and that shall be a warning to us to come no more."

Then bade they all farewell, and fared back across the fjord; and each morn at daybreak looked Frithjof forth to Baldur's stead until he saw across the blue water the whiteness of the linen-spread roof, and he sang:

"No more, good friends of mine,
Shall we cross to Baldur's meads;
White spreads the snowy signal
That ends our days of joy!"

The song brought Bjorn to his side, who, shaking his head, said:

"Now have the kings come. I misdoubt me there will be trouble afoot. I will go see to our men and plenishing."

So they crossed to Baldur's meadows no more.

III

The Witches, Ellide, and Jarl Angantyr

WHEN the kings saw the gathering of Frithjof's men, they feared and took counsel how they might rid themselves of him, and they settled to

send him to gather tribute of the Jarl of Orkney, and told him their will.

"I will go," said he, "for it is the duty of us Jarls of Framness to collect scatt for the king, but ye must bind yourselves by strict oaths to leave my lands in peace till I return."

And they bound themselves.

So Frithjof made ready Ellide, taking great store of food and eighteen men, and sailed away for Orkney; but when he was gone those faithless kings went straightway to Framness and burned the house to the ground. Then they sent forth two evil witch-women to raise a storm at sea and drown Ellide and all her crew.

The great storm came up, and good Ellide laboured through the waves day and night for three days. There was no sun to help them, and no stars by night, and their case was hard.

At first Frithjof was of good cheer, and sang :

"Farewell, sweet maids, of Baldur's stead !
 Drink mead to our fair voyage ;
 My tarred and trusty sea-horse sailed
 So blithely out of Sögne."

Then said Bjorn :

"Art thou of so light a mind that thou canst think of naught but the maiden while we labour in this tempest ?"

"Other songs have I for all seasons," said Frithjof, and he sang of the gods and the deeds of great dead men, but ever came back the song to "Ingebjorg, Ingebjorg !"

So great grew the tempest as days went by that Frithjof lost patience, and said :

"Should we be wrecked, each of us must have

gold, for I doubt me this is no honest storm, but is a witch's brew."

He drew Ingebjorg's ring from his arm, broke it, and divided it among the crew; then he climbed on the foremost peak of the vessel—the swan's head—and looked forth through the grey mirk and mist.

And behold! there was a great whale that they had seen before circling around the ship, and there were two ugly women on his back.

"Ho! ho!" shouted Frithjof above the storm-shrieks, "these are they that have brewed this tempest! Methinks I see the hand of Helgi and Halfdan in this."

Then sang he to Ellide:

"Hail, my good ship,
Ride over the waves,
And drown me these witch-wives speedily."

And Ellide instantly rose with her sharp prow high in the air and drove straight at the whale, so that it sank and the witches were seen no more.

At once the weather brightened and they came safe through the shore-breakers to a little sheltered harbour in Orkney; but the men were so weary that they sat on the benches and could not stir, so Frithjof picked up eight men at once and carried them safe to land; but Bjorn could only carry two and Asmund one.

Jarl Angantyr of Orkney sat in his house as his wont was, and one of his men sat outside the hall window looking over the sea to windward, to keep ward. This they did in turns, for so the great jarl would have it.

This man, who was called Hallward, watched,

and drank ale as he sat. Presently he looked back through the open window and sang :

“Men I see far at sea
Sore storm-worn are they,
And their ship can be naught
But Ellide, the swan.”

Then said Angantyr : “Tell me more.”

Hallward said :

“They come ashore, and one is so mighty that he carrieth eight men at once.” Then the jarl sprang up and said :

“Go meet them, for this strong man can be none but Frithjof, son of my old friend, Thorstein of Framness.”

Then they came up and Angantyr received them gladly, but when Frithjof told his errand, he said :

“See now, Frithjof, to Helgi and Halfdan pay I no scatt, for they are fools and cowards, but to thee will I give whatever money thou wilt.”

So Frithjof thanked him, took the money, and abode there, with great feasting and joy, till the winter was over-past.

But soon after Frithjof had sailed from Norway there came good King Ring to wed Ingebjorg.

And she liked him, for he was wise and noble, though her love was given to the son of Thorstein. Then was there much feasting, but, ere she set forth to return with Ring to Sweden, Ingebjorg saw how the king looked narrowly upon her arm-ring, the gift of Frithjof; for in sooth it was too mighty a weight for a maiden's arm. Then asked he :

“Whence came that wondrous ring upon thy arm, fair wife?”

And the red flew to the queen's cheek and she could not answer.

"I doubt not that it is the gift of Frithjof," said Ring, "since no other ring is there like unto it. Gold is there in plenty in Alfheim, leave thou this behind."

Then did fair Ingebjorg, sighing, hand the ring to Helgi's wife, charging her straightly to give it to Frithjof at his home-coming, and she went forth with Ring, who loved her dearly.

IV

The Turmoil in Baldur's Meads

WHEN spring was come Frithjof and Angantyr parted in good fellowship, and Frithjof sailed oversea and up Søgne fjord. There a fisherman told him of the marriage of the princess and the burning of Framness. So they all lay on their oars and took counsel. "First," said Frithjof, "we must pay the Orkney scatt. After that, perchance things may happen."

So they rowed to the hall of the kings and found that they were at Baldur's temple. Therefore went Frithjof and Bjorn up thither, bidding Asmund and the others to break up every boat that they could find thereabouts. Then, while Bjorn remained without, Frithjof went into the great hall, where he found the kings sacrificing, and the queens beside a fire on the ground, in the middle of the hall, dusting and anointing the wooden statues of the gods. So Frithjof strode the length of the hall up to Helgi at the altar, and crying:

"Here, king, take the tribute!" he flung the leathern bag of silver full in Helgi's face, so that two of his teeth were knocked out, and he fell down senseless.

As the jarl turned to go, he beheld his goodly gold ring on the arm of Helgi's wife, and being now mad with his wrath, he seized her arm and pulled the ring off, and the wooden figure in her lap rolled down into the fire. Halfdan's wife caught at it hastily, and her god also fell into the fire. The wood being old and much anointed with precious oils caused the fire to flare up, even to the roof, so that all was soon ablaze.

But Frithjof got his ring and went out; then Bjorn met him and, hearing his news, they hastened to the sea. Then Helgi followed after them speedily to slay them, while Halfdan tried to fight the fire; but Asmund had broken all the boats, wherefore Frithjof and his men got safely aboard, and lay on their oars, mocking at King Helgi, who, stark mad with anger, stood upon the strand and, fitting an arrow to his bow, made as if to shoot Frithjof. But with such sudden force did he stretch the bow that both ends snapped, whereat Frithjof laughed the more, and seizing two oars of Ellide, plied them so mightily that they also broke. Then sang Frithjof:

"Beli's daughter,
In Baldur's meads,
I kissed and love troth-plighted.
Helgi's bow,
Ellide's oars,
Are broken, in sooth, as our troth."

Then said Bjorn:

"This is a pretty coil, brother, and I doubt

me that it means outlawry. Whither shall we turn?"

"Norway is no longer home," said Frithjof, "so we go a-viking."

Thus, since they might not stay in Norway, they went a-warring in summer, and abode with Angantyr, who welcomed them gladly, through the winter-tide.

But the evil brethren called a Thing, or meeting of the people, and by false witness and slander, had Frithjof made an outlaw, so that they could take his lands.

V

The Stranger called Thief

NOW Frithjof grew rich and famous with his summer warrings, for he strove only against bad men and evil things; bonders and chapmen did he not touch. But when three winters had passed he longed with all his heart to see Ingebjorg. So he said to Bjorn:

"Go thou and raid this winter without me, in the Middle Sea; I go to Sweden to talk, unknown, with King Ring; but on the first day of summer come thou back here and thou shalt find me."

Then said Bjorn:

"This counsel of thine is foolish. Ring is old and wise and mighty; he will know thee and bring thee to harm. Better were it to go to Sögne and slay those niddings."

But Frithjof was set on it and he went, while Bjorn was made headman and sailed away south to raid.

When he came near to Alfheim, the place of King Ring, at the fall of the year, he dressed himself in rough clothes, and made himself an uncouth beard, and walked bent like an old man, with two sticks, for he feared his great height would betray him.

When evening came he drew his hood far over his face, and made his way, blinking and shaking, to the lowest place at Ring's hall table.

Then said Ring to Ingebjorg :

"There is a greater man than all others come into the hall"; and he bade a house-carle ask him who he was and whence. And Frithjof answered :

"A salt-boiler was I, Thief is my name, with Wolf was I last night, and in Angerheim was I born."

The carle told Ring, and the king sent to fetch the old man before him.

"How art thou called?" he asked.

"Peace-Thief, when I go a-viking; Spear-Thief, when I let loose my arrows; Isle-Thief, when I harry the islands; Battle-Thief, when I conquer kings; yet now am I friendless and weary—cast adrift among salt-boilers."

"Where didst thou sleep?" asked Ring gravely.

"In the house of Wolf."

"Then must that be the great forest, for no man dwells here called Wolf. Thou sayest thou hast no home; mayhap this is thy home, because thy heart is here."

Frithjof stared at the wise old king with the keen blue eyes that knew so much; and then the queen said wearily, for she cared for naught since Frithjof was parted from her :

"Get thee to the guest table."

"Nay, sweet wife," said Ring courteously; "I bid thee welcome him to my table."

"Nay, king," said Frithjof, "let be; I am not used to sit with lords."

"Do my will," said Ring.

So Frithjof cast aside his tattered cloak and beard, and there was he, tall above all men, clad in a blue tunic, girt with a belt of silver, on which hung a purse, through the rings of which the red-gold glistened. His great sword hung at his back, and on his strong left arm shone the goodly golden ring, with its deep-cut runes.

Then Ingebjorg spake not, but she flushed rosy-red, and the king smiled and stroked his long white beard, as he asked:

"How long didst thou boil salt to earn that mighty ring?"

"It was an inheritance from my father, and it is all I have from him," said Frithjof.

"Maybe thou hast yet more of an inheritance over the mountains westward," said Ring.

And Frithjof guessed that he was known, but said naught, and ever "Thief" was he called since he told not his name. So he abode in Alfheim through the winter, well-loved of Ring; but with Ingebjorg spake he not a word.

At the time of the great winter feast, they all went over the frozen river on the ice to get to the meeting-place on the other side. As they started to cross, the king and queen, being in a heavy sledge, Frithjof said:

"Methinks this is not over safe," and the king said kindly:

"Thou art ever thoughtful for us."

But the queen said to the driver, "Drive on."

So when they were in mid-stream the ice cracked with a noise of thunder, but Frithjof ran up and drew forth the sledge with the king and queen and horses, just as they were sinking. Then said Ring, smiling :

“Surely Frithjof the Strong had not done a better deed than this.”

When the flowers and grass began to spring up, and the larches to put on their young green, showing that spring was come, Ring said :

“Let us go into the forest and see the fair earth putting on her fresh beauty.”

And when they were come into the thick wood, Ring drew Frithjof aside and said to him :

“I am weary and would sleep.”

“It is unseemly that Ring, the king, should sleep in the wood. Wait till we are home,” Frithjof answered shortly.

“I will sleep,” repeated the old king.

And he laid his head in Frithjof’s lap and slept.

So Frithjof sat and watched gloomily, and evil thoughts crowded into his head.

If Ring were dead then could he wed Ingebjorg. But Ring was his good friend ; so sorely was he tempted that he drew his sword and cast it as far from him as he could throw.

When Ring awoke he looked steadily into Frithjof’s eyes and said :

“How many and how wild things hast thou thought, FRITHJOF, while I slept ; but thou art the soul of honour. I knew thee as thou didst enter my hall. Comfort thee, for a good fortune shall come to thee soon through thy brave patient waiting.”

Then they rode home, and all men rejoiced when it was made known that Frithjof the Noble had dwelt so long among them.

VI

Frithjof's Reward

THERE was a great knocking on the door of the king and queen's sleeping-room one bright spring morning, and Frithjof called aloud :

"Frithjof is here ready to set forth."

Then he came in and thanked the king in well-chosen words for his many kindnesses, and turning to Ingebjorg he said :

"This my ring do I give thee with a parting kiss, fair queen. Live happily ! "

And he kissed the red gold arm-ring and threw it on to her bed.

Then King Ring arose laughing and said :

"After all, thou hast given the queen more thanks for thy winter quarters than ever thou hast to me," and he bade the house-cooks make a great feast of parting for Frithjof.

At the feast the king said :

"Why shouldst thou go, my son? My boys are yet but children, and I am old and cannot guard my kingdom for them against covetous and evil men."

But Frithjof shook his head and said :

"I love Ingebjorg still and dare not stay here and see her more."

"I know it," said Ring gravely, "but my death cannot be far off. Then give I her to thee, thou brightest hero of Norway ; and, with her, give

I the kingdom to thee to ward until my sons be men."

"I thank thee, king," answered Frithjof, "but I and all my people have been Jarls of Framness, and we ask no better lot."

But the old king entreated, and Frithjof, because he loved and honoured him, agreed to stay as guardian of the two lads, and ruler under Ring. He sent for Bjorn and his men, and they dwelt prosperously in Ring's land.

After a space Ring fell ill and died, and there was great mourning throughout the land for the just king. And they made him a mighty mound at the edge of the forest that he loved, and put therein more treasure than has ever been buried in the land either before or since, for all those who loved him would cast in something.

And, when some months were over-past, Frithjof and Ingebjorg were married; and great was the wrath of her brothers Helgi and Halfdan, who made ready to go up and war against Frithjof. The jarl gathered a goodly host, and Bjorn brought also the men of Framness to fight for their lord, and in a short while Helgi was slain. Seeing this, and knowing that Halfdan was but a stupid follower of his brother, Frithjof raised a white shield to stop the fighting, and sent to tell the king that, if he would do homage unto him for Sögne, he should go and dwell there in peace.

This he did gladly, but Frithjof kept rule over Ingebjorg's dowry portion, and also over Framness, these being two-thirds of the whole of Sögne-land.

He also made peace with Baldur, and gave great gifts to his new temple, so was the god not wroth for the burning of the first one.

When King Ring's sons were grown, Frithjof, having duly shown them how to rule well, gave over to them their father's kingdom, and went, with Ingebjorg, back to Sögne, where Halfdan soon after died, childless, leaving his lands to Ingebjorg. Thus all Sögne-land came under one rule.

Frithjof and Ingebjorg had two sons, Gunthjof and Hunthjof, and lived long and happily together. They also died together, and were buried in one mound close to the mounds of their fathers, looking over the western sea to the sunset.

THE STORY OF LAME HOWARD

IN Iceland did it sometimes befall that the rich and strong did unjustly by the poor and weak, and for these there might be no redress ; but in this tale is it set forth, how, despite the high kinship and great power of Thorbjorn of Icefjord, for his ill-dealings with Howard of Bluemere, was he rightly brought to shame.

I, Thorhall, kinsman of Howard and his homeman, saw all these things ; therefore am I the man who should set them forth.

I

Thorbjorn and Howard

THORBJORN dwelt at Bathstead, a fine holding on the shore of Icefjord Deep. Great was his wealth, and many men were in his following ; priest was he also of that district, so that in no matter whatsoever might he be gainsaid. Each year did he and his men grow more evil, yet naught was said aloud until he took Sigrid, a rich and well-born maiden, with all her plenishing into his house, where he set her to household tasks, while her wealth he used for his own ends.

Then came Thoralf of Loonsere, her kinsman, saying :

“Thorbjorn, Sigrid is nigh of kin unto me. Let her loose that she may dwell in my house, and that I may set her money out to usury. Shame is it that thou shouldst use it for thine own ends, and give her naught therefor.”

But Thorbjorn and his evil-mouthed, ill-favoured kinsman, Vagr, mocked at him and bade him begone. Then said Thoralf :

“For this time must it pass, since Sigrid may not fare forth without her plenishing. But look thou well, Thorbjorn, despite thy kinship with the Dukes of Sweden and Kings of Gardar,¹ hard shall it go with thee ere long for thy sins.”

Then Vagr sprang after Thoralf hooting and mocking, and Sigrid abode at Bathstead.

Now over against Thorbjorn's land-take dwelt Howard of Bluemere, the poor man of this story.

Old was he now, but a great viking had he been aforetime, faring forth and harrying with the greatest chiefs, until by reason of a hurt upon his knee, he fell a-limping, and could sail abroad no more. Then came he to Icefjord, although far to the east did his own kin dwell, and marrying Bjargei of Swanstead, a woman of good family there, he hallowed to himself a fair take of land over against Bathstead, and wroth was Thorbjorn thereat, for such was his nature that he could ill-abide that another should have land, even though he could in no wise work it himself.

One son had Howard and Bjargei. Olaf was he called, a fair youth and well-favoured, tall above all the men of the fjord, though he numbered but

¹ Russia.

sixteen winters. Foremost in place and courteous in speech was he, and ever dutiful to his parents. Bear's-warmth had he, since Bjargei had wrapped him from the first in a bearskin, and never did he need the warmth of clothes, but went forth, even in winter weather, clad only in shirt and breeches.

Thus might it be foreseen that the evil Thorbjorn would look black upon Olaf, since all men in that district honoured him and praised his deeds; and Sigrid, seeing that it angered Thorbjorn, did also lose no chance of lauding Olaf. So he cast around to find cause to harm him, but at first came there none.

Now was it the custom at the third week of spring to drive forth the sheep on to the fells, that they might feed there for the summer, and ere the first day of winter went men up to the sheep-walks to drive them down. And this year it befell that many were amissing, and all men gave them up for lost, save Olaf, who going forth ere the first day of winter, found them and brought them down. Then, passing by each steading, he left the sheep that bore that man's ear-mark, thereby earning much thanks, until he came to Bathstead, and there he counted sixty sheep of Thorbjorn's mark.

At the house was the door shut, since all were at meat, and many times did he knock. Then came Sigrid, who greeted him warmly, but noted not that Vakr, the evil one, stole behind her:

"Welcome art thou, Olaf Howardsson," said she, "and, were this but my house, fain would I bid thee sit at meat."

"There is no need," said Olaf laughing; "I came but to bring Thorbjorn's sixty wethers from the high ground. Since he liketh me not, carry thou the news."

And they talked further, but Vagr, hearing so much, stole back to Thorbjorn and whispered :

“Olaf, the great fool, hath brought thy sheep.”

“So much the better,” said Thorbjorn.

“Aye, but that is not all. He talketh still with Sigrid at the door, and me-seemeth she liketh him well.”

So did Thorbjorn hate and fear Olaf the more, since he knew that if there were talk of a wedding between Olaf and Sigrid he must needs give up her wealth. And never was Vagr behindhand to sow evil counsels and carry ill tales.

Next autumn again did it befall that Olaf found the sheep of Thorbjorn and drove them down.

But this time came no one to the door, so Olaf strode into the hall and told Thorbjorn of his doings.

Then Thorbjorn sneered with an evil smile and said :

“We know thee now for a sheep-driver, Olaf Howardsson, seeking a share of the sheep for thy reward, as beggars do.”

Then turned Olaf away, flushing red. “No more do I drive sheep to Bathstead,” said he, and strode forth from the hall, and Vagr sniggered.

The third year did it happen even as the others, but Olaf left Thorbjorn’s lost sheep in the uplands, so that Vagr put forth the saying that Olaf had stolen them. So waxed Thorbjorn’s hatred ever, and time went on.

Thereafter did Olaf a deed that brought him much fame. There dwelt at Bakki a man named Thormod, whose wife was Thorgerda, and it was said that he was shape-strong, or a skin-changer. And the meaning of this was that at times, being dour and sullen of mood, did he take upon himself

the shape of a wolf or other beast, and so roam about at night. Now is it well known that shape-strong men never may bide in peace in their hoves,¹ but wander abroad as ho'ibos. Therefore, no wonder was it to all men that three weeks after the death of Thormod, did Thorgerda come into the hall at Bluemere. Weary was she, and soon did Bjargei set her in the high-seat by the fire.

"What tidings hast thou, Thorgerda, since thou comest so far afield?"

"Ill tidings, Bjargei, for Thormod resteth not in his hove—so is it ever with shape-strong men—but home cometh he each night. In my steading will none touch him, therefore came I unto Howard for help."

But Howard shook his head.

"Aforetime could I have wrestled with a ho'ibo and prevailed; but now am I outworn and old. Go thou to Bathstead; a chief should be ever ready to quiet his own country-side."

But Thorgerda said:

"No help ever comes from Thorbjorn. Thankful shall I be if he leave me in peace. Let sleeping dogs lie, say I."

"Even so say I," said Bjargei. "Yet canst thou not live with a ghost that gives no rest."

Then said Howard:

"Here is my counsel. Olaf, my son, is young, but manly is he for his years, and first in all play. Try what he can do for thee."

So did Thorgerda, setting forth her tale of the ill-tricks of Thormod.

Olaf laughed and said:

"What a youth may do, that will I for thee

¹ Graves.

gladly, friend Thorgerda. But, mind thou well, with a hoïbo have I never yet striven, and mayhap will he get the better of me, for no weak man was Thormod in his lifetime, and so will he gain yet more strength."

This he said since a hoïbo that overcometh him with whom he strives, takes unto him the strength of that man.

So Thorgerda abode at Bluemere that night, and next day went she and Olaf forth to Bakki.

That night set Olaf his bed at the end of the hall, and the fire burnt low. Then came Thormod stilly into the place, and his white eyeballs gleamed and his bald head shone in the dark. And seeing a bed where none was wont to be, he caught at the covering thereof, so that Olaf sprang up and wrestled with him.

Great was the noise, for Thormod gripped sore, and the benches flew about as they struggled. Thus came they to the door and outside into the meadow, when Thormod tripped upon a drift log and fell, so that Olaf hammered his head hard upon the log, and he lay still.

Then, thinking he had made an end of him, Olaf returned to the hall where frightened folk had gathered and lighted lights. Then did all praise him, and stroke his bruises, and give him great thanks, thinking to be well rid of the hoïbo; wherein they were mistaken.

But the fame of Olaf went abroad throughout all quarters of the land, and Thorbjorn hated him the more.

For a while lay Thormod quiet in his hove, thinking on the battering he had got; but in the hard winter weather as Olaf came from his sheep-

folds he met Brand the Strong, houseman of Thorbjorn, but a quiet man of pleasant tongue.

"How is it with thee, Brand?" asked Olaf.
 "Hard is the winter on the beasts."

"Harder on the beasts than on thee," quoth Brand, "since nought hast thou on but shirt and breeches! Mine is an ill tale. Since morn have I driven these sheep. Yet ever standeth a man with waving arms in the road, so that they may not pass. I would that thou shouldst go up with me."

"That will I blithely," said Olaf, "since methinks that must be my friend Thormod of Bakki at his tricks again. This time, if I prevail, will I make an end of him."

And behold there stood Thormod in the path, with waving arms, and Olaf stopped and said:

"Which wilt thou, Brand: drive sheep or play Thormod?"

"The easier will I," quoth Brand, "and that is drive sheep, since never have I tackled a hoïbo."

So Olaf ran hard at Thormod, who stood upon a snow-hill above him, and caught him round the middle, so that they struggled together and rolled over and over until they came on to the fjord shore. There, by good hap, was Thormod undermost, so that Olaf broke his neck, and, swimming out to sea, sank him in the deepest part and ever after were strange noises heard there, so that never more would any man sail nigh that part.

Now this was the only man that Olaf had ever slain; yet was it not a man but an evil thing, and great good was it to make an end thereof.

When Olaf came ashore, he found that Brand had gathered his sheep and waited but to give him thanks. Then did each go his own road.

Now, when Brand got to the hall of Bathstead, Thorbjorn greeted him, saying :

"Late art thou with the sheep. Have things gone amiss?"

"Nay," said Brand, "but amiss would it have been but for Olaf Howardsson."

Then did he tell of Olaf's deed.

"Any fool can tackle a ghost," jeered Vagr.

"Any fool can talk," said Brand hotly, "and thou art ever biggest in talk as a fox is in his tail. Next ho'ibo that cometh will we give thee to tackle."

And hotter did they grow until Thorbjorn waxed wroth, and said :

"Make ye an end of this talk of Olaf and Olaf and Olaf! Sick am I of his name, and would hear it no more."

But for this did Thorbjorn hate Olaf the harder.

And it befell that winter that a great whale came ashore on Howard's strand. But Thorbjorn coveted this whale, and would have it that his own drift rights stretched even past Bluemere shore, which was not reason. So claimed he the whale, which was a fat and big one. Therefore did Howard withstand this unrighteous claim, and all the men come together for the cutting up of the whale said it was truly on Howard's shore; but, since Thorbjorn spake ill words and would not give way, did they fetch Thorkil, the Lawman of Eider Isle. Learned was he but of weak courage, and would ever be trying to please both sides, whereby it fell out that neither was ever content.

He, being come, and seeing where the whale had grounded, said, whispering :

"Surely the whale is to Bluemere. Howard's must it be."



They rolled over and over

But when this was told to Thorbjorn much was he angered, and, rushing at Thorkil with his sword, cried he :

“Niddering, whose whale is this ?”

“O thine ! thine ! I see that I erred,” quaked Thorkil.

So Thorbjorn and his housemen cut up the whale with all speed, and Howard, sore and ill-content, returned to Bluemere ; while all men murmured yet more against Thorbjorn.

That winter was Howard still and sad, and when spring was come said he unto Olaf :

“My son, nought can we do against Thorbjorn and his wickedness, and I am minded to bide here no more lest he do us further wrong.”

“Ill were it to flee when we are in the right, father ; but what thou wilt, that I do.”

“Across the fjord have I been,” said Howard, “and there found I wide lands and fair meads. No man owneth them, and there shall we be farther from Bathstead and nearer thy mother’s kin, which pleaseth her also. Neither is it far from the stead-ing of Thoralf of Loonsere, so we shall have a good neighbour.”

So across the Icefjord did they flit, and set up a fair and large house that was named Howardstead, and there they abode in peace and were beset by Thorbjorn no more.

Yet had he not forgotten, for through that country-side was ever talk of Olaf and his brave doings, more than I have time to tell.

II

Of the Undoing of Olaf

NOW at Mead lived a well-loved and wise chief, named Guest Oddleifsson. A man of great following also, so that all desired to be in friendship with him. Dark and spare was he, but tall and of good mien; courteous to all men and just, so that never was a feud raised against him. Moreover, to him were all difficult suits brought to be judged, and even they who were worsted had no cause for a back-word.

Then Thorbjorn, seeing that all Icefjord hated him, bethought him that to marry the sister of Guest would bring him power, so that, having Guest at his back, none might withstand him.

Then did Thorbjorn ride to the Thing at midsummer and laid this matter before Guest. But Guest, knowing the ill-renown of Thorbjorn, met him but coldly at the first; nathless so hard did Thorbjorn plead his wooing that, in the end, Guest said :

“ Little to my mind is this match, since naught but evil is told me of thee, Thorbjorn; but this will I do. An thou strike hands with me and promise to cease thy ill-doing, and to wrong no man further, then shalt thou have Thorgardis. But if thou go back in thy word the marriage shall be void and Thorgardis shall return to Mead.” For so was it by the law of Iceland.

Now Thorbjorn cared not what he promised so he got his will, and he rode forth gaily from the Thing to hold the wedding.

And when news of this came to Bathstead, Sigrid sent to Thoralf and said :

“ Now is my chance to fare forth of this hateful place. Summon thou the settlers to appraise the worth of my goods that Thorbjorn hath used, then will I go with thee to Loonsere.”

So did Thoralf in haste, and Olaf was one of the men summoned ; and when the value of the goods was named, Sigrid sailed over fjord to Loonsere with Thoralf. There did she oftentimes meet Olaf, and they liked each other well.

But when Thorbjorn returned to Bathstead, evil was his mood that Sigrid had gone, and yet more did he hate Olaf since he had been at the appraising of Sigrid’s wealth. Now, by reason of the change of pasturage, were Howard’s sheep very wild, and there came the herdsman one morn to Olaf and said :

“ Tend and seek can I not both do, wilt thou stay by these beasts, or find those that are lost ? ”

“ Bide thou here,” said Olaf, “ while I search.”

So he took his axe in belt and fared down to Loonsere, and said :

“ Mayhap these foolish beasts have got to where they came ashore from Bluemere.”

And so it was ; then, seeing that they pastured quietly, Olaf turned aside to Loonsere to greet Sigrid, and sweet was their greeting.

But, as they talked, Sigrid looked over fjord and said :

“ There see I a boat crossing the water ; and in it Thorbjorn of Bathstead and that evil-doing thing, Vagr. Mischief will they be at, since arms are in the prow and atop of them Warflame, the sword of

Thorbjorn. Olaf, I pray thee, meet them not, for Thorbjorn hateth thee the more since thou wert at the valuing of my goods, and Vagr is an ill bird to meet when he hath a strong man to back him."

But Olaf laughed and said :

"From two men might I never run, and since Thorbjorn has had no hurt from me, why should I fear him?"

Then Sigrid sighed and said :

"But eighteen winters hast thou, and how canst thou fight a well-seasoned man, with that wicked Vagr at his heels?"

"Then, fairest, I give thee my word I go not to meet Thorbjorn, yet, if we meet and his mind is set on fight, there will be a brave tale to tell thee."

"Never shall I ask it," said Sigrid quickly.

"Now must I forth for those same sheep," said Olaf, springing up, "bide thou happy and blithe till I come again."

And forth went he, but Sigrid's heart was heavy.

Now when he was come to the shore, Thorbjorn and Vagr were nigh a-land, so he shouted to them heartily and ran in to help beach the boat asking :

"Whither away, Thorbjorn?"

"To see Thordis, my sister, the mother of Vagr and Scart, at Knoll. Wilt thou come along?"

"Nay," said Olaf, "I may not, though my will is good, since these sheep must be driven home. And," laughing, he said, "ill would it suit Thorbjorn, the priest and chief of Icefjord, to turn sheep-drover."

"Nay, I heed nought of that," said Thorbjorn, and turned him to go with Olaf.

Now, seeing a great forked stick of driftwood lying, Olaf caught it up to drive the sheep, and though Thorbjorn was merry withal, Olaf noted how he and Vagr would ever lag, so kept his eyes warily behind him as they walked. And as they came to the parting of the ways, Thorbjorn said, turning him about :

“Me-seemeth this place will serve, Vagr, for what we have to do.”

Then, seeing their mind, Olaf ran to the top of the knoll so that they must needs come at him from below, and guarded himself with the forked stick ; but ever struck Thorbjorn at him with Warflame until the cudgel was whittled away and he must needs take his axe, and so well did he fight that Thorbjorn was in two minds whether to leave him.

Now it chanced that the sister of Thorbjorn, hearing the noise, went to see the reason thereof, and running back to the house called unto her other son :

“Scart, go thou help Thorbjorn and Vagr to kill Olaf Howardsson.”

But Scart looked glum and said :

“An I went, I had liefer fight for Olaf Howardsson, for black shame is it that two should fall on one, and he but a youngling. I will not go.”

“Niddering art thou,” cried Thordis, “liker to a daughter than a son, since thou helpest not thy kinsfolk. Niddering shalt thou be through the fjord, though I tell it myself.”

Then was Scart wroth, since none will be called niddering by a woman, and snatching his axe he ran down to the knoll, and, unseen by Olaf, he fetched him a blow between the shoulders. Then

did Olaf turn and strike him so that his head was split and he fell dead. But Thorbjorn, with War-flame, smote Olaf in the chest and across the face so that his teeth fell out and he fell dead also.

Then did Thorbjorn stoop and gather the teeth in a kerchief.

"Why dost thou that?" asked Vagr.

"They may yet serve me," said Thorbjorn, and, wending to Knoll, he made all known to Thordis and her home-men. And in this one thing did Thorbjorn well and truly—that he told all concerning the fight as it befell, nor sought to hide the good fight that Olaf had made. So became the fame of Olaf greater, dead, than it had been living.

Then went Thorbjorn to Loonsere to ask for Sigrid back, but she was not there, nor was she ever seen again of men.

Great was the mourning for Olaf throughout the district of Icefjord; and they buried him in a hove in the midst of a fair green meadow by the shore, and raised such a cairn as had never been seen before in Iceland. Within they laid his arms and many goodly gifts; so fared he forth well-plenished on his long journey; and the place is called Olaf's Rest even unto this day.

III

The Woe of Old Howard

HEAVY-HEARTED were the folks of Howardstead, and great sorrow was now their portion, since had Olaf been ever the light of the house. And Howard grew feeble and old with his woe, so that he must needs take to his bed, and

leave all work to Bjargei; the while she grew strangely staid and still, but strove ever to keep the house with Thorhall and the home-men.

No blood-feud was there for Olaf, since Howard could do naught, and his kin were far afield; and the kin of Bjargei could in nowise take up the feud alone.

But after some time it befell that Bjargei went unto Howard; much thought had she taken ere she spoke:

"Goodman, it is not meet that our son should be unavenged. Since a blood-feud may not be, go thou to Thorbjorn and ask a were-gild."

Then arose Howard heavily, and said:

"No good will come of it with Thorbjorn, yet shall it be as thou sayest."

And he gat him forth across Icefjord, and came to Thorbjorn, who asked:

"What matter hast thou in hand that thou troublest me here, old man?"

"This matter have I," said Howard, "that thou pay me were-gild for Olaf, my son."

Then did Thorbjorn frown, and Vakr laugh and mock, and in the end Thorbjorn said:

"Never paid I were-gild yet, though many men have I slain without cause. Yet, since thou art old and poor and past fighting, is it meet I should treat thee otherwise; therefore take thou my old horse, a fit mate will he be for thee, since he, too, is old and grey and lame. Yet, as he hath been well-fed for seven days past, he may have spirit enow to bear thee home."

Then did the red blood fly to the worn face of old Howard, but he spoke no word, and, turning, went forth down to his boat, with Vakr whooping

and mocking behind him, to the strand. And he betook him again to his bed, and lay there long, while the word of Thorbjorn's wickedness went abroad and even more was he hated. Yet was his measure not yet full.

Sore wroth was Bjargei when Thorhall told her all, but she held her peace awhile, and so the year wore round to the time of the summer Thing.

Then came she again to Howard and said :

"At the Thing wilt thou have justice. Rise and ride up with the others. This is my rede."

"Bad is thy rede," said old Howard wearily, "hath not Thorbjorn Olaf's-Bane mocked me sorely enough that I should seek him again in sight of all men gathered at the Thing?"

"Nay," said Bjargei, "go thou to Guest Odd-leifsson or Steinthor of Ere, just men are they and lief will they be to see thee righted and our son Olaf avenged."

Much more said she, and in the end Howard busked him and rode forth, saying :

"An Olaf be avenged, naught of pain nor of mockery do I grudge."

And Bjargei, watching at the door, sighed as she saw how bent and white and old her man had grown.

Now when Howard came to the Thing all men were gathered, and the booths set up ; so straight rode he to the largest, which was that of Steinthor of Ere, and, going in, he greeted well Steinthor and his men. Ruddy of face and golden-bearded was Steinthor, broad and tall above all other men of his day, since Olaf was dead. Merry withal was he, and loving a joke, yet swift in anger and quick to give back a blow.

Then did Steinthor give back old Howard's greeting, and—

“Tell me of thy name and kin?” said he.

“Howard of Icefjord am I,” he answered; and Steinthor said:

“Then was young Olaf, the well-beloved, whom Thorbjorn slew, thy son?”

“Even so, and for his slaying claim I were-gild.”

And Howard set forth his wrongs, so that Steinthor fell grave, and for some time spake not.

Then said he:

“Lief am I that thou shouldst bide in my booth, but keep thou thyself well from the folks, since there is much rough play about, and too sorrowful and old art thou to mix therein.”

So Howard made him a bed in the inner part of the booth, and there lay, day in day out, nor spoke to any, and the time of the Thing wore on apace. Then came Steinthor to him and said:

“What boots it to come to the Thing and lie abed, friend Howard?”

“Naught boots it,” said Howard, “but my heart faileth me, so that I cannot face the ill-words of Thorbjorn, for sore am I yet from our last meeting.”

“Nay,” said Steinthor, “no sense is this. Get thee forth to Thorbjorn; since thou art of my booth, he scarce can flout thee.”

But Thorbjorn, waxing proud by reason of his marriage with Guest's sister, was even more foul of mouth to Howard than he had been aforetime, so Howard grew wroth and turned from him, saying bitterly:

“Too old am I to get justice. Ah, that my

early days could be again, so that I might right this one great wrong."

And as he went with downcast head, then met him Guest Oddleifsson and his following, and Guest looked narrowly at the sad and bent old man as he passed him by, and when he was come to his booth, said he unto Thorbjorn :

"Who was the old man who, even now, went forth?"

"Too many men come and go here for me to know them," said Thorbjorn carelessly; but he well knew whom Guest had seen.

Then Guest saw that there was somewhat amiss, and said :

"Nay, but this was an old and well-grown man, albeit he was halt-foot and heavy with sorrow. Moreover, a lucky-man did he look, and not one to be crossed lightly."

Then was Thorbjorn uneasy, since ill is it to cross a lucky-man, and he said :

"Howard of Icefjord might it be?"

"Whose son, Olaf, ye slew?"

"Even so," said Thorbjorn.

"And so holdest thou to thy promise to me?" said Guest, greatly angered; and he turned to a man and said :

"Fetch me here old Howard, and say that Guest Oddleifsson of Mead would speak with him and will back his plea."

So, after much bidding, Howard came to Guest and told him all his tale. Then was Guest wroth beyond measure and turned upon Thorbjorn :

"So great a wickedness have I not known in Iceland. Useless is it to award a fitting were-gild, since that thou couldst not pay; but here is my

judgment. Three times a man-gild shalt thou pay, Thorbjorn, and since thou hast not the wherewithal for so great a fine, one man-gild will I myself lay down."

"As thou wilt," said Thorbjorn; "that will I pay whenever we are at home."

"Nay," said Guest; "here and now will it be paid, and as for thee, Howard, oft shalt thou visit me and take back good gifts, and never will I fail thee in any suit thou takest up. Here is my man-gild."

And he paid it well and truly down, with the ring of Thing-men standing round to see that the count was right; but Thorbjorn made shift to pay little by little, and when one man-gild was paid:

"I have no more," saith he.

"That is not sooth," quoth Guest; "pay on!"

"May be *that* will content thee, Howard," said Thorbjorn with an evil frown, and taking the teeth of Olaf from his pouch, he cast them straight in the old man's face, so that the blood ran down.

Then was Howard's cup of sorrow full, and casting down the money so that the silver flew every way over the ground, he fled with a bitter cry to his berth in Steinthor's booth, and there lay, neither speaking nor eating.

But Guest was more wroth than ever before:

"Shame upon thee, thou wrong-doer! no kin shalt thou be to me," said he, and turned from Thorbjorn.

Straightway rode Guest to Bathstead, and took therefrom Thorgardis, his sister, and her wealth; so that thereby was Thorbjorn brought to great shame and loss.

And Howard gat him back to Howardstead,

the richer by two powerful friends, since Steinthor of Ere had also sworn to back him in his suits. All this he told to Bjargei, then laid him sorrow-stricken and woe-worn in his bed, and there abode throughout the winter. But Bjargei grew full of anger.

"Well is it," said she, "that the man-gild was cast away, for now will we have blood-feud for Olaf, my son."

IV

The Planning of Bjargei

SO passed the winter-tide.

Now was Bjargei wont, each day, to row out seaward in the fjord with Thorhall, so that he wondered much what was in her mind, since something else lay therein than the catching of fish.

At length one day she espied a boat coming from Bathstead, wherein were Thorbjorn and his men, and she said:

"Take we up our lines and row athwart his beam."

And so did Thorhall, and Bjargei stood up and cried:

"Whither away, Thorbjorn?"

"Westward to Vadil to fetch my brother and his son," answered he shortly, for much did he fear the wit of Bjargei, and ill-luck was it that she should cross his beam.

"How long wilt thou bide away?"

"Mayhap a week."

And while they talked Thorhall rowed round and about the boat, and more uneasy did Thorbjorn

grow ; and when she had made an end of speaking he and she rowed away at their hardest. But Thorbjorn was troubled, and said :

“ For little would I row after her and cut her down, since methinks she is but a witch.”

But Brand the Strong rose up and answered him :

“ See thou, Thorbjorn, ill enough hast thou wrought in that house. An thou art minded to do more, I take their side to help them with my might.”

So was Thorbjorn vexed, but he dared say naught since Brand was his best man.

Then did Bjargei lean on her oars and watch the boat as it went.

“ Methinks,” she said, “ there will be a mighty avenging of Olaf, my son.”

“ I would this might be, mistress,” quoth Thorhall.

“ Now row me to see Valbrand, my brother, and his sons, Torfi and Eyjolf.”

And when they were come to Valbrand, there found they all men gathered in the home-mead, and Valbrand came to greet them, saying :

“ Stay this night, sister, and tell me thy will.”

“ Home must I wend,” said Bjargei, “ since Howard is lonesome, but I would that thou shouldst lend me thy seal-nets.”

“ Three have I, sister ; one old and proven, two new and untried, which wilt thou choose ?”

“ The new will I have, brother ; make them ready against I need them.”

Then rowed Bjargei to her brother Thorbrand ; old was he now, but two brave young sons had he, Odd and Thorir, and he greeted her well, and asked :

"What is thy will, my sister?"

"Loan of thy trout-nets would I, brother."

"Three have I, sister; one old that once was strong, and two new and unproven, choose thou which thou wilt."

"The old one dare I not risk, therefore make thou ready the new ones against I need them."

Then, since she could not bide the night, rowed she on to Asbrandstead, where dwelt her brother, who was wed to the sister of Howard. One son was his, a strong man of good courage, Hallgrim by name, whose fosterer was Arne.

And Asbrand questioned her even as the others had, and bade her bide the night, but she would not.

"All my will is that thou shouldst lend me thy turf-axe," said she, and Asbrand answered smiling:

"That will I gladly; here be two, one is old and rusty, the other bright and untried and new."

"The new one will serve," she said, "keep thou it ready until I send."

So turned Bjargei homeward, and for many days was very full of thought.

Now by this means did her brethren know that ere long their young sons would be needed for some great deed, since for the new seal-nets and trout-nets and turf-axe did she beg. Yet no word had been spoken that could by any means be carried unto Thorbjorn for a warning.

Now when she counted to look for Thorbjorn's home-coming, went Bjargei to the bed of Howard and said:

"Good man! sleepest thou?"

And Howard sat up and answered:

"No sleep has been mine all these weary days, since the light of mine Olaf was quenched."

"No sooth is there in that," said Bjargei, "since no man could live three years without sleep however clever might he be. Now is the time come for the avenging of Olaf. All is planned out for thee, so get back thy lost youth, since, if our son be avenged at all, it will be this night."

So Howard sprang up and busked him briskly. From the weapon-chest took he his helmet and mail-coat that Bjargei and her maidens had kept ever bright. Then looked he forth from the window, and beholding a seamew fly across he sang :

"Hail to the bird of slaughter
High screaming, seeking his meal,
Filled shall he be in the morning
If he but wait here by the sea."

Then put he out also weapons, good and true, for Thorhall; and as he went forth he turned and kissed Bjargei, saying :

"Farewell, good wife, since it is none so sure that we shall meet again."

"Nay," said she, "with thee so young again and hardy, no fear have I but that soon shall come the avenging of Olaf."

Then went Howard and Thorhall and launched the six-oared boat, and forth they rowed to Valbrandstead.

And while Thorhall watched the boat, went Howard, spear in hand, to where all were gathered at the making of the hay, and Torfi and Eyjolf had laid aside their high boots for comfort's sake.

Then did Valbrand greet Howard well and gladly, and ask his will.

"For the seal-nets promised to Bjargei am I come," said he.

And Valbrand went to Torfi and Eyjolf and said :

"Thy kinsman is here and is busked for the fight ; take ye the best weapons and get ye forth with him and think of naught but the vengeance."

Then did the sons cast down their rakes and run to their boots, but so was the leather shrunk by the sun that, as they pulled them on, the skin came off their heels. Yet little recked they of that, but rowed forth to Asbrandstead and Thorbrandstead, whence came Odd and Thorir and Hallgrim, with Arne, his fosterer.

And when they were come to the boat that Thorhall warded, were there eight goodly men, all well-armed save Howard, who had no sword ; and Hallgrim said :

"Ill to go from home, kinsman, lacking a sword."

"It may be that soon I shall have Warflame, for it is in my mind to meet with Thorbjorn Thiodreksson."

Then did they all rejoice greatly, for sore had they been that their kinsman lay unavenged in his hove.

So rowed they gaily over the fjord and lay to in a goodly haven that Thorbjorn had made. Then said Howard :

"Beyond the boat-house is a pool where we may lay up the boat unseen ; light labour will it be to pull it thither, since Thorbjorn hath laid these runners of whale-ribs right up to the boat-house on the ridge."

So did they, and then hid themselves behind the ridge so that none landing at the haven might see them, and Howard gave them this rede :

“Let none spring up until I call, for we dare not be hasty in our hunting.”

That evening when light was low came Thorbjorn to Bathstead. Ten men were they : Thorbjorn, with Sturla, his brother, and Thiodrek Sturlasson, Vagr, Brand, and five carles. And Thorbjorn said :

“Since late it grows, here may the boat abide for to-night. Vagr, bear thou up our weapons.”

So Vagr took first the swords and spears and bore them up past the hidden men. And Torfi said low :

“Take we the swords?” but Howard answered :

“Nay, let bide. But go thou, Hallgrim, softly after Vagr and bring me Warflame from the pile when he hath laid it down.”

So Hallgrim ran swiftly and silently and brought Warflame to Howard.

Then past came Vagr once again, laden with shields, and this time sprang Howard’s men up to take him ; but hearing the rattle of their mail, he turned him about to flee ; and being heavy-laden, stumbled in the dusk and went down.

And his head went first into a pool, and so weighted was he by the shields that he might in no wise struggle forth, and thus was smothered.

This was the end of Vagr, a nidding death to die, and a fitting for such as he. No Valhalla would there be for him, said all, but only a place among the hanged men—Odin’s thralls.

Now when Thorbjorn saw that strange men were

upon him he ran and cast himself into the fjord, and Howard, seeing this, leaped straight in after him ; the meanwhile Brand caught up a whale-rib and stove in the head of Arne, Hallgrim's fosterer. Then did Hallgrim run at Brand with his axe and smite him also on the head so that he died then and there, and Hallgrim was free to swim out after Howard and Thorbjorn.

Now these two made a long swim of it until they came to a small isle that Thorbjorn knew of, and he, landing first, caught up a big stone to smite Howard on the head as he came ashore. But as he swam Howard bethought him of a strong new faith, whereof word was come from Norway, the god of which, men said, gave victory to the right. And Howard vowed a vow that if safe he came to land, and had good vengeance for the slaying of Olaf, his son, heed would he give to that god, and serve him well unto his life's end.

Now, by good luck it happed that Thorbjorn slipped and fell back so that the weight of the stone was upon him, and so greatly was he stunned that Howard, who had held fast to Warflame, came up and thrust him through.

By this had Hallgrim also come a-land, and he stood watching.

Now did old Howard take Warflame, the sword, and smite the face of Thorbjorn so that his teeth fell out, and Hallgrim said :

" Ill striking a dead man, kinsman ; what need of that last stroke ? "

But Howard leaned on Warflame, and looked grimly down on that evil dead man for a space ere he spoke :

" Since Thorbjorn smote me in the face with

my dead son's teeth have I owed him this stroke. Such was my vow; for thus did he smite Olaf a coward's blow with this same savage sword."

Then did they swim to land and thereafter did men call this the bravest of Howard's deeds that he, being old, swam forth in the dusk with only a foe ahead and no knowledge of where he would land.

And when they were come to Bathstead, there ran to meet them Torfi Valbrandsson, and he said:

"Hail, kinsman! is Thorbjorn slain?"

"Dead is he," quoth Howard, "and here have I Warflame. What have ye done?"

"Sturla and all of that side are dead, but our Arne is slain also."

Then went they up to the boat-house, and Eyjolf asked.

"Wilt thou that we slay the thralls?"

But Howard said:

"Nay, kinsman, a poor vengeance were that for Olaf. Let them bide here and watch that none steal our spoils."

And when morn came it found Howard so greatly heartened up that no more did one look on him as an aged man, and, this blood-feud having so far fallen out well, he even seemed minded to carry it further, for he said:

"Brethren have Thorbjorn and Sturla. Me-seemeth that if we make not an end of Liot, the chieftain, no peace shall we have. Of Thorarin Thiodreksson have I no fear since he is a wise man, and content with were-gild will he be for his brethren. But not so Liot, therefore go we up to Moonberg to slay him."

Then took they the two boats, and therewith what spoil they chose, and rowed up to Moonberg,

where they slew Liot only and none of his house-carles, and, being a hard and cruel man, none felt sorrow for his death.

V

Of the Safe-Ward of Steinthor

THEN said Howard to his kinsmen :

“For our deeds done these two nights we need safeguard, lest any slay us unawares before we come to judgment at the Thing. Therefore is this my rede. Go we straightway to Steinthor at Ere and ask his help, which he promised me at the Thing.”

So to Ere they rode, and up went they into the hall as Steinthor sat at meat, and Steinthor greeted Howard, saying :

“Name me thy name, and tell me thy wish.”

“Howard of Bluemere and Howardstead am I.”

“Surely not that old Howard that sheltered in my booth at the past Thing?”

“Even that same Howard,” he answered.

And Steinthor laughed out and said :

“Was ever such change in man, lads? He scarce might dodder from booth to booth with a staff, and here is he straight and ruddy of cheek—a man well fitted to bear arms, despite his halting foot. What news do ye bring?”

“Much,” said Howard, “even of our slaying Thorbjorn, Sturla, and Liot Thiodreksson, and many of their men besides. That have we done for blood-feud of Olaf, my son.”

“And where seek ye safe-warding after these mighty deeds?” asked Steinthor.

“Well,” said Howard, “since thou didst

promise me some little help at the Thing, and since this is a righteous feud, we were even minded to come to thee, O Steinthor."

Now did the chief of Ere look grave for a space ; then burst forth his great laugh as he said :

"Since to shelter thee in a blood-feud be but small help, fain would I know what thou wouldst call great help? But my promise is given, and I were no good friend to take it back, therefore abide thou here until an end can be made of this matter at Thing. Glad am I, forsooth, to get such mighty men."

Then did all shout their thanks to Steinthor, who bade Howard take the high bench over against him, so that the fire was between them. On the right of Howard sat Hallgrim, Thorir, and Odd, and on his left sat Torfi, Eyjolf, and Thorhall ; and at times Howard sang them a stave, since no mean scald was he.

Then said Steinthor :

"Blithe of heart art thou, friend Howard. Mescemeth thou hast no fear of Thorbjorn's many kinsmen and their feud."

"No fear have I since my son Olaf is well avenged. Young at heart am I, though grey and lame, and right ready to help thee in thy wishes."

So abode they there for the winter and had much play, for many and great were the skin-plays and ball-plays and wrestling matches they held in the short winter days. So were they all good company.

But Bjargei abode at Howardstead, adding to Howard's store of money, for a stirring woman was she, and none harmed her.

Now the keeping of all these men at Ere was a costly business, and as winter wore away Steinthor

thought well to go to Otterdale and ask stores of Atli, who was wed to Thorgardis, his sister.

Now Atli was rich and of great kin, but skin-flint and starveling was he, small and bald; and ever, night and day, did he work to save the keep of home-men. A store-house had he, filled with dried fish, flesh-meat, cheese, and stores of wadmal, fur skins, and all things needful, and there did he make his bed, despite the smell of all these things.

Now it befell, one morning ere day came, that Steinthor came to the bed of Howard, and, pulling him by the foot, bade him stand up.

Then sprang up Howard and all his men, one after another, since where one went went all, and they joined Steinthor in the garth, and Howard said:

"Whithersoever thou ledest, Steinthor, there we follow; but my pride is in this—to take no journey till I know its end."

And Steinthor laughed and said:

"We go but to see my brother-in-law at Otterdale, and I guess no fighting will be toward."

So they ran out the boats and rowed them down to Otterdale. And Atli, looking from his door, shivered, for the morning was raw and frosty; but yet more did he quake when he saw the company of Steinthor making for his steading.

Now in the home-mead stood a haystack, and, with little steps, for he was slow of foot, did Atli run and scrape a hole in the stack. Therein he crept, and pulled hay down over him so that he was well hid.

"An I be not there," said he to himself, "small mischief can they do, since Thorgardis is his sister."

Now when Steinthor came to the house Thorgardis came running to greet him gladly.

"Welcome art thou, brother, and thy company, for rarely dost thou visit me."

"Fain am I to be here, sister mine," said Steinthor, "and I would ask a favour of Atli. Is he toward?"

"Even now was he here," said Thorgardis; "mayhap thy men would seek him in the garth."

They sought him within and without, but could not come at him, and this is small wonder, since none would think to turn over a haystack to find the owner thereof.

Steinthor waited long, and in the end, Thorgardis said:

"Tell me thy will, brother; mayhap I shall serve as well as Atli?"

And Steinthor said:

"Minded was I to ask Atli to sell or give me stores."

"Are not Atli's stores and plenishings mine also, since with my money were they bought?" said Thorgardis laughing, "take all that thou wilt."

So Steinthor thanked her, and bade load the boats with all things needful. But Atli saw naught of this, since the fjord lay on the far side of the house, else had he scrambled forth from his hay-heap to stop the plundering. And when all was loaded, Steinthor said:

"Wend ye your way home while I bide here with Thorgardis. Methinks there will be sport toward when Atli comes to his storehouse, and I would fain be there to see."

"Nay," said Thorgardis, "this is an ill rede,

brother. Naught of sport will there be in Atli's talk when he cometh, and too hot of temper art thou to bear his words. Get thee forth with thy men."

"Nay, nay," said Steinthor, laughing, "bide I must; but this will I do for thy sake—in no way will I cast up against Atli the words he shall speak in his wrath, and ever shall we be friends as heretofore. Will this content thee?"

"That will it," said Thorgardis, "since thy word is ever sooth. But get thee behind these hangings until the first of his wrath be spent."

And at eve did Atli, being by this time both sore and cold and an-hungered, creep forth from the haystack; so stiff was he that scarce could he drag himself to the house, and all his teeth were chattering in his head. And when he was come to the store-place he stared around as one daft, and it was long ere he could speak, but Thorgardis made as though naught were amiss, and warmed a fur robe for him at the great fire.

"What robbers have been here?" quoth he, at last.

"Robbers none," said Thorgardis, "but just Steinthor and his men asking stores, which I have given them."

Then did Atli set him down to rock and howl and weep for all his loss.

"Woe for the day I took thee to wife. A spendthrift woman! A robber-woman from a robber-house! Woe is me for my toil and laying up for mine old age, when thou, light-headed one! scatterest all abroad in a day. Now must thou and I become beggars, and wend from door to door seeking alms. Aiei! Aiei!"

So did Thorgardis let him wait for a time until the robe was warmed (the while Steinthor laughed behind the hangings), then she said :

“Make an end of thy foolish plaint ; well knowest thou that great wealth hast thou untouched. Wrap thee warm in this in bed, and eat thy food, for meseemeth thou art by ordinary cold. Where hast thou fared all day ?”

But Atli told her not for very shame where he had been.

Then crept he into bed, railing ever at Steinthor and his kin, until the warmth and good food brought a better humour upon him, so he was silent awhile, then said :

“In sooth, thou art a good wife and Steinthor is none so bad. So will I not grudge him our stores since he would e’en help us in time of need.”

And as he went on with the praising of his brother-in-law, Steinthor came forth from his hiding-place and greeted him, saying :

“How sayest thou, Atli? have we beggared thee by the clearing of thy store-house ?”

“Nay, nay !” quoth Atli, “what is mine is thine. So great a leader art thou, that I hold it honour to give thee of my best, seeing that thou shelterest those whose case is hard, and helpest to put right what is amiss.”

Then sat himself Steinthor down on the bed-foot, and spake thus :

“See thou, brother-in-law Atli, a waste of thy life is it to potter after thralls’ jobs for the saving of a groat. Get thee home-men to do thy work, and make thyself no longer a house-carle. Good parts hast thou ; make thou thyself a leader of men

and plague Thorgardis and thyself no more with these foolish ways."

And since this was much speaking for Steinthor, who dealt ever more in deeds and laughter than in the stringing of words, Atli saw that it was sooth, and said:

"Reason is in thy words, brother-in-law Steinthor, and it shall be even as thou sayest. Much patience hath Thorgardis had with me, since this is not the way of her up-bringing in thy house. Henceforth—and this is my promise—shall all be otherwise ordered."

Then did Steinthor and Thorgardis laugh, and give Atli much praise for his wisdom, and at dawn did they part in all kindness, and Thorgardis thanked her brother for his good rede.

And Steinthor wended his way home, and there abode until the time drew nigh to ride to the Thing.

VI

The Doughty Help of Atli

THEN did the men busy themselves greatly with the brightening of weapons; and the women, with the making of shirts and breeches for their kin; that a brave show might be made before all folks gathered at Thing. And not least well-found were Howard and his following, since the winter-long had Bjargei and her maidens wrought and spun for them, and so had sent them to Ere all things needful.

Now, a few days before the Thing, came Atli and Thorgardis to Ere to see the mustering; and Steinthor said to Atli:

"Much troubled am I for lame Howard of Howardstead. An he ride Thingward with me, surely will there be mischief for the slaying of Thiodrek's sons and kin; and if I bid them bide here, surely will it be known, and their men will come and burn them up in Ere; and no mind have I to see Ere burned for another man's feud."

And Atli thought awhile and said:

"Man of peace though I be, yet am I, as all know, strong enough to withstand a night onslaught at Otterdale. Sooth is it that bad blood will be between these folks at the Thing, since word has come to me that Thorarin, the priest of Dyrafjord, brother of Thorbjorn, is minded to claim a judgment at Thing for these slayings. Therefore, brother-in-law, bid Howard and his men busk themselves and ride to Otterdale. There shall they shelter and be welcome to my best until the Thing be over-past. But see thou, Steinthor, that the judging is done by Guest Oddleifsson, so that justice may be sure and fast."

And Steinthor said:

"Thy help is great, so mind thou to call on me shouldst thou have need, and what I may do, that will I for this."

Then was this plan laid before Howard, who gave them much thanks, and, after they had watched the riding forth of Steinthor and his men, they, with Thorgardis and Atli, wended their way to Otterdale, where Atli gave them a two-handed welcome and a mighty feast, and clearing out the store-house, gave it them for a dwelling; so that they hung their weapons around the walls, and laid each man his bed beneath them. And there abode they in all cheerfulness.

But Steinthor, having summoned all his men, both kinsmen and friends, many and powerful, rode forth with three hundred men. The bravest following of all that district was his, and this was well for the furtherance of the suit he had in hand; since, however just the cause, naught is it amiss to give it a good backing.

Now turn we to Thorarin Thiodreksson, the priest of Dyrafjord. Old man was he and wise, and when came to him word of his brethren's slaughter, much thought did he take.

Then called he unto him his friend, Dyri, with Dyri's son, Thorgrim. A wizard was this last, mighty in limb, and cunning in powerful spells. With these two did Thorarin take counsel.

"See ye," he said, "since this blood-feud falls upon me, to Thing must I ride."

"Even so," said Dyri, "and with thee will I go, since together we can make mustering and following of two hundred men. There shall we find Steinthor of Ere, and with him Howard, since Steinthor is banded with Howard to shelter him."

"Nay," said Thorgrim, "word have I that Howard is not away to the Thing, but has gone, with ten men, for safe-ward to Atli, the miser, in Otterdale. Therefore is this my rede: Get ye away with your company to the Thing, and I and eighteen stout fellows will ride round by Otterdale and compass the slaying of Howard and his kin. But Atli will we spare, since naught is there to gain by a blood-feud with Steinthor."

And to the two elder men this seemed good counsel; so Thorgrim and his eighteen men went, by secret ways, over the fells to Otterdale, and

came down upon it at early morn. There did they hide in a hollow and bait their horses, waiting until the dawn.

Now in Otterdale was a wakeful night, since Atli snored and tossed and laboured so in his sleep that none might rest. In the end sprang up Torfi Valbrandsson, saying:

“Wake must he, since not one of us can sleep while he sleepeth.”

Then did he shake Atli hard, so that he sat up in his bed and stroked his bald pate.

“Dazed art thou,” said Howard, “and hard hast thou worked. Mayhap that something has been made known to thee in thy sleep?”

“Even so,” said Atli, “for methought wolves ran over the fell southward and came here, eighteen in number; and ahead of them ran a fox more evil and sly than any ever I beheld. And it went hither and thither, snuffing us out, and over-grim looked all the eighteen. I wot that these be men-shapes, so were it well to rise and busk us for fight.”

So sprang they all up, and took their arms swiftly, being minded for a good fight, and Atli said:

“Here is my rede: Even as Steinthor said hath it befallen, and these Dyrafjorders have come up to take us; but, since none of us is wishful to burn within doors, best were it to creep outdoors; then shall we take them unawares, for meseemeth no one of you is minded to flee!”

Whereat they laughed. Then did Atli spy forth and mark the stealthy coming of Thorgrim, and he said, full low:

“Thus do I order ye for the fight. Thorgrim—little though I be, champion though he be—I am

minded to take for myself ; to thee, Howard, who art proven strong in fight, though old, I give two men ; to Hallgrim, who is also stout, two men ; to Torfi and Eyjolf, four ; to Odd and Thorir, four ; to the other five I allot six men ; since none so strong are they."

Thus was it ordered, and ill-pleased was Thorgrim when he beheld the men standing ready, yet naught could he do but go up to the fight.

Then did Atli the Little rush with fury upon Thorgrim, so that hard put was he to guard himself with his two-handed sword. Back and forth went the blows, but neither sword bit.

Then quoth Atli, breathless :

"Wizard, Thorgrim ! will no sword bite on thee ?"

"How darest thou call me wizard, thou little wretch, since I hew and hew at thy evil little bald pate and nought avails ?" cried Thorgrim wrathfully.

"This is fool play," quoth Atli, and casting aside his sword, he ran in under Thorgrim's arms and threw him down on the meadow ; then did he hold him by the throat, and, reaching for his sword, cut clean his head from his body. Then, being scant of breath, he sat him down upon the grass and looked round upon the fight.

And behold ! of the Dyrafjorders all were slain save three, and of Howard's men none, though many were sore hurt.

"Will ye slay them all ?" cried Atli, having by now found his wind.

"Nay," said Howard ; "Olaf is well avenged and Arne also ; therefore may these be spared."

"Then will I put them to good use to make a

mock of 'Thorarin," said Atli; and he sat him down and shaved the hair from their heads and gave them this word:

"Go ye to the Thing and find Thorarin and Dyri, and say that I bid them think twice ere they send again to burn Atli the Little in his bed."

Then went forth the three, and Howard and his men gathered the slain and buried them surely; whereafter they sat them down and rested while Thorgardis bound up their wounds. So they waited for the judgment of the Thing.

VII

The Judgment of Guest Oddleifsson

NOW comes our tale to the gathering of the Thing. Greater was it this year than most, since all those districts were roused with the talk of Howard's blood-feud.

Then came together Thorarin and Dyri and Steinthor and Guest, and long did they speak. And in the end Steinthor said:

"Foul was the slaying of Olaf, old Howard's only son, and still fouler the mocking of the old man by Thorbjorn at the Thing; still, since Olaf is avenged, Howard would fain have peace, and to this end am I here. Also, since to Guest Oddleifsson of Mead are all things known, I would that he should award judgment, and his judgment do I pledge Howard and his following to accept."

Then said Guest:

"Blithe am I that this woeful matter should be finished, and to that end give I this award:

“At the Thing last passed gave I three were-gilds for the slaying of Olaf Howardsson; therefore against his death shall be set the deaths of Sturla, Thiodrek, and Liot, since they were guiltless even as he was. Thorbjorn, for his injustice and evil-doing, shall be un-avenged; so also Vagr and Scart—Vagr, for his meanness and ill-speaking and mischief-making, and Scart, for that it is a coward stroke to hit a man from behind. The slaying of Brand the Strong will even the death of Arne, since good men were they both. And no otherwise can I fairly say. But for the easement of thy mind, and since my old friend thou art, Thorarin, shall these men wend overseas while thy life lasts, to wit, Hallgrim Asbrandsson, and the sons of Valbrand and Thorbrand. And that peace may be on the Icefjord, shall Howard and Thorhall, his kinsman, no more abide in this district, but shall move away whithersoever they be minded.

“And now this counsel do I give ye all, that this peace be held well and truly by ye all henceforth on either side.”

And for a space there was silence in that great company; then stepped forth Steinthor, and he went bondman for the peace of Howard and his kin, since none were then present.

Thorarin and Dyri also gave word that with this award were they content.

But as ill-luck would have it, ere the Thing was ended, up came those three shaveling carles and told the tale of Otterdale, and all said that Thorgrim was rightly served, but Guest waxed greatly wroth:

“Is there any in this whole land of Iceland,” said he, “like unto the sons of Thiodrek for guile

and wickedness? What respect have ye for the Thing and its judgments that ye come here for justice while ye seek your own revenge? Rightly has it fallen out, Dyri, that thy son is dead. And now mark ye well both—by reason of the evil ye have planned, count me no more your backer, for never more will I strike hands with either of ye in a bargain. But thou, Steinthor, in that thou hast helped an old and helpless man, and that through thee has this man been righted, count me ever thy friend, since I deem it an honour to be friends with such an one as thyself.”

To this did Steinthor, being well pleased, make fitting answer, and all departed in content from the Thing, save Dyri and Thorarin, who lost honour and men and friends by their ill-doing.

Then, being come to Ere, did Steinthor send for Atli and Howard and their company, and all fared thankfully and joyfully forth, giving great praise to Atli for his sheltering and his doughty fight; so was Atli holden in high favour from henceforth throughout that country-side, and a right merry life led he and Thorgardis thereafter.

Now fared Howard back to Icefjord with his kin, and well content were Bjargei and her brethren at the tale of their doings.

Then did Howard set forth a great feast, and bid thereto Steinthor and Atli and Guest, with all their kinsfolk and following. Right merry were all for the week's space they spent in Howardstead; and well did Bjargei order all things, hiding well her sighs for Olaf dead, since no true hostess would she be to show a heavy face at her own board.

And when the day of parting came, gave Howard unto Steinthor thirty sheep and five oxen, with a sword, a shield, and a goodly golden ring; to Guest gave he nine oxen and two golden rings; to Atli also and unto all the kinsfolk of Bjargei who must wend overseas, many rich gifts according to their needs; and to Hallgrim gave he Warflame, and to all did he render great thanks for their help in the avenging of his dear son Olaf. So went all forth from Howardstead well pleased; and those that must leave Iceland sailed forth to join the Viking chiefs of Norway, with whom they gathered much renown and riches.

Now turned Howard's mind to the vow that he had made in Icefjord, and, since through the help of that new unknown god all had fallen out thus well with him, told he all unto Bjargei, and asked her counsel.

"Since thy word is ever sooth," said she after much thought, "forth must we wend to Norway to seek word of this new god from Olaf Trygvasson, who followeth this faith. But first, since by Guest's judgment a new land-take must we get, go thou forth with Thorhall and seek a settlement."

So Howard went forth with Thorhall and found good land in Oxdale, and this they named Thorhalldale.

Then leaving Thorhall to build and make all ready, forth fared that aged couple with many goodly gifts for the king. And when King Olaf saw them and heard their will, a two-handed welcome did he give them, and straightway told them of this gentle faith of the White Christ.

And there, in Norway, at this time died Bjargei, full of peace and years; but Howard abode there

for the winter, much honoured of the king and his jarls, since all knew the renown of his early days ; until in spring he gathered great store of fine timber for church work, and sailed back to Iceland for the last time. But short space had he been back when he called unto him Thorhall and said :

“ Sick unto death am I, and fain would I be with Bjargei and Olaf ; and since true hast thou ever been to me, Thorhall, unto thee give I all my goods. But of the church-wood that I brought from Norway build thou a goodly church and lay me therein. So shall my grave ever be a witness to the help that came unto me from the White Christ.”

So died Howard, and even as he said did Thorhall.

And the fairest building in all the land was the temple of the White Christ, and great was the fame thereof and of Howard, through whom it was built.

And this is the tale of Lame Howard, and I, Thorhall, know that it is sooth.

THE END

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